The Marplot

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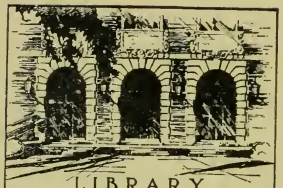

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THE MARPLOT

THE MARPLOT

BY

SIDNEY ROYSE LYSAGHT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III

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PART III

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THE MARPLOT

PART III

CHAPTER I

A NEW ASPECT OF A DESPISED WORLD

EVERY one's conduct is shaped to a greater extent by artificial conditions, fettered more often by unseen bonds, than the world believes. For many a man such restraints are giving an undercurrent of tragedy to his whole life, while he is meeting the world with the air of one well pleased. For him, for instance, who knows that he has missed his mark, who must forsake the work he loves for the work he despises, in order to support those who depend upon him ; for him who sees the maiden of his dreams when it is too late, and

there are barriers between them. These may live in a free country, and seem to be free men, but they go to the grave fettered: the only paths they care to tread are barred to them.

Dick's fortune differed in degree, not in kind, from that of thousands. Artificial restraints had been imposed on him in exceptional measure. To the unnatural bonds of his marriage and the barrier of Elsinora's engagement had been added his obligation to O'Connor. His nature was intolerant of restraints; he rebelled against them one and all, and the only path which gave any semblance of freedom led to death.

During the first days following the duel one thing only was clear in his mind: there was to be no compromise, no dream of agreeing to O'Connor's conditions, no accept-

ing orders from another man as to his relationship with the woman he loved. He chose freedom for a short period rather than bondage for life. He would have accepted death by torture at this time rather than humiliate himself before his enemy or sacrifice his right to endeavour to prevent him from marrying Elsinora.

Indeed a curious part had fallen to the hero of a comedy,—one which Humphry would have seen pointing to a final exhibition of ridiculous anticlimax rather than tragedy. But not so Dick: the emotions born of the realisation of impending death had not yet been felt; his imagination displayed for him what he would win in sacrificing his life, and did not now concern itself with the cost. It was later on that the great question would arise: whether

his love of life or his love of a woman were the stronger.

Early on the morning after the duel he had started for the mountains with the other men, but he was too restless to remain with them shooting. Tom Longfield arranged to meet him a week or two later at Farinder, and said good-bye to him, fully believing that before long he would be ready to accept O'Connor's most reasonable conditions.

Dick went homeward to Farinder now as he had first set out when he went to face the world, on foot, and when near the end of his journey he struck into the road by which he had previously travelled. He had wished to be alone to reflect on his position; he had faced it steadfastly, and his life began to adjust itself to its new conditions. The days of tramping through the country in bright sun-

shine had brought some quiet to his disturbed thoughts; he had looked curiously and with strange interest at the beauty of the life of the world around him, which he was to leave so soon. The first feverishness had burned itself out; he seemed to have awakened from a dream. It was the evening after he had reached familiar country, and was nearing the end of his day's journey, that an idea, which grew into a resolution, came to him as an inspiration. It was this: that his death should be a great one, that it should serve some noble end.

The idea possessed him so strongly that he could not rest. After taking some refreshment at the inn, where he had purposed to remain until next morning, he suddenly changed his plans, and set out to walk during the night. He felt no fatigue;

his aroused imagination spurred him onward. He was no longer the same man who scorned himself and the world, and sorrowed over lost illusions. He would not be conquered and lose his life tamely. He would do something of which all who loved him—of which Elsinora—could be proud.

Here was a theme for his imagination : to be bound by nothing which commonly shapes men's lives, not even to the necessity of preserving his life. His dream of death had no fixed shape ; it was vaguely in some great cause, vaguely dramatic. The opportunity of heroism, the lack of which in modern life he had so often mourned, was now afforded. Of difficulties came not a thought. The miserable failure of the last few years would be cancelled by the end ; the barriers which had been set between him and love would be

carried away. He would exchange the right of living in intolerable bonds for the privilege of dying the death of godlike men. And the heroic figure he cut before himself was almost compensation for the penalty.

Every turn of the dark road was now familiar to him. He passed a silent village; it was only ten o'clock, but its day was complete. Here and there a light remained in a cottage window, but most of its simple inhabitants were already asleep. The ploughing of the field, the tending of the cattle, the old round of laborious duties had been gone through with, perhaps, just at this time the stimulating variety of cider-making added; and the night brought rest. These good, round, honest, English pates, little vexed with dreams, lay shelved a-row for the night; the story of human life here written, as it

were, in words of one syllable, sleeping with the sleepers.

Beyond the village he took a track which led off the main road up over the hills in the direction of Farinder. From the heights of the bare dark heath was won a vast horizon ; all that was visible of the world was the ring of darkness which began where the starlight ceased ; the starlight was above and around and beneath ; the earth itself was but the resting-point from which to look into the starry spaces of the universe. No homely cloud of the earth's fashioning, no sound of its voices, not even of the wind, touched the silence of the everlasting day of the heavens. Night is a child of the kind earth, darkness a thing of human eyes ; but neither night nor darkness has a meaning in that reign of the eternal deeps.

Never before had the wonder and glory of creation so fully taken possession of him. And now it seemed to him as a marvel how, in any circumstances, it could have been possible for him to see life as a common thing, to take for granted, or despise, or howl about. He looked back upon years of revolt, of indifference, of complaint, as incomprehensible. Now that he was destined to say farewell to the earth and its conditions of life, the joy and beauty of this first home in the universe was shown to him again with even more than its early charm.

And would it not be a consoling thing if it might be given to us to behold the young gentleman of our day who solemnly asks the question, 'Is life worth living?' allotted one year of life — he being the while in his customary condition of good health and ease

—one year of life, with sentence to depart at its end? Life the gray would then shine for him so rosily, he would pipe so pathetic an eye for the daily food of existence. Or still better to mark under the same sentence our well-to-do complacent citizen who has converted the temple of his soul into a strong-room, and has neglected his opportunity of enjoying the earth's sunshine and laughter. Would this not shove him off his patch of mud? Would not this one year of life teach him more than he had learned of all the others? And you, my sweet Christian dowager! who impertinently abuse the kind earth and censure the human heart, such a sentence might give you the lesson in thankfulness and charity which your much frequenting of churches fails to teach you.

Dick walked on steadily through the night

without meeting a human being. Now and then some distant sound reached him from the hidden valleys—the bark of a dog, or a clock striking the hour, far remote. He passed a heathcutter's cottage, and looked in at the window, from which a glimmer of light shone; the room was empty, and a log of wood still smouldered on the hearth. Farther on some cattle lay on a slope of grass sheltered by furze bushes; they lifted their heads but did not move as he passed. The world was asleep, wrapped in forgetfulness, a shade in the lustre of the universal worlds, a pause in the eternal wakefulness of the heavens.

Towards morning, but while it was still dark, he came to the end of the path across the moorland, and entered the cultivated country. He began at last to feel the fatigue of his long walk, and desire for sleep came

to him also. After the excitement of the thoughts which had occupied him, he was weary in mind as well as body. He was only ten miles from Farinder now, but could go no farther. A hayloft in some farm buildings offered shelter, and here he slept till the stars were hidden and the earth had again found the sunshine.

When he awoke the sunlight was streaming in through the round window of the loft across the loose hay; cheerful sounds of the farmyard greeted him; hunger assailed him. Oh, but it was good to be hungry, pleasant to see the sunshine in the hay, and hear the cattle munching their food in the stall underneath, and the labourers' voices in the yard! It was homely, human; it gave a sense of fellowship. The mystery of the solemn depths of the universe, of the stars and their

companies, was lost. Here was the kind old earth flooded with sunshine. The exaltation of noble death, of kinship with the immortals, lost glory in the laughter of the autumn morning. Life was good ; the earth was generous ; the grave was cold.

Hunger, the mother of enterprise, drove Dick into the farmhouse. As it is known that criminals on the morning of execution often partake of a hearty breakfast, it can be easily believed that the sentence of death, a year ahead, did not interfere with his appetite now. Amongst the many modern maladies from which he suffered were not included the two most rampant, indigestion and theological colic ; and the former immunity now permitted him to make an irresponsible meal of fat bacon and rough cider. His progress afforded real pleasure to his

hostess. After breakfast he lighted his pipe and sat on the warm stone steps of the barn talking to the farmer's three little children. Death seemed very remote.

As he went his way quietly along the familiar road, the pure luxury of living stole over him. Everywhere was something to rejoice in; all common sights and sounds grew dear. All that had been passed by formerly with the unconscious comment, 'You are always here. Some day I shall make your better acquaintance,' now replied, 'You are going and will never know us now.' When he bade good-bye to the farmer's children and one said, 'When will you come again and tell us the other story?' he said, 'Some day,' with a feeling of pain.

Oh, it was good to be alive! Good to see the sowing of the ground, and think of

the wonderful presence of life which would make the brown earth green again. Pleasant to see the blue smoke of the weed fire curling against the hedgerow, to watch the starlings feeding among the flocks of sheep, to hear the caw of the rooks, the hum of the threshing machine, to smell the bracken and feel the cool autumn wind blowing up out of the north-west.

Presently, on the open country to the right, he saw a stag racing down the wind towards the moor, and the hounds full cry on his track; then stag and hounds and huntsmen were lost in a hollow. Over the down in front other riders, out of the running, were coming up. People he knew would be amongst them without doubt; he had an odd feeling of shame at the thought of meeting them. Young men of the world, hale squires,

yeomen, merry dames, storekeepers of British sporting tradition and British soundness of nerve, cheery folk, well equipped and horsed, and confident in themselves ; there was something antagonistic between his condition and theirs. He turned aside to avoid meeting them, but three of the riders came diagonally across his path. He recognised Margaret Longfield and stood still, but she did not notice him as she passed. No sweeter picture of maidenhood could be seen than this girl galloping across the hill on her thoroughbred. Her face was radiant ; she was smiling at something her companion had said. Dick had but a glimpse of her face now, but her smile brought back many memories. He mused lovingly on her smile. There was a sparkle of fun in her eyes when she smiled which gave suggestion of breezy days in

spring-time, and made her expression as different from that of mere sweetness as the smell of sweet-briar is different from the lily's.

The sight of her filled Dick with sadness. Her happiness, her healthful joy of life, stood as a barrier between him and her. Here was the girl he loved better than all his other friends, and she was light-hearted and content, and he was doomed to death and could tell her nothing of his secret, nor hope for her sympathy. He must go his dark way to the end alone. Something of self-pity was excusable. His mood of exaltation could not be maintained, and his manful determination to meet his fate bravely lost nothing of its strength, that his heart was melted at the touch of old sweet love which must be left.

He went on his way, thinking sadly of those he loved and of what his death would

mean to them. Their love was, after all, the great possession, the best that life had given, the hardest to relinquish. He remembered the belief which Elsinora had expressed to him, that man was made immortal by Love, that Love was the part of his nature which was rooted outside himself, and that he would some day find again his own life treasured for him in the soul of everything he had loved on earth. It was a pleasant faith enough; but to him it was a mere idle speculation, and there was reality in having to leave the dear friends and knowing no part in their years of life on the kind old earth, and sharing no further fellowship with them in the old familiar paths. It was hard to think of them—of Nan who loved him so deeply, who had no other near one left, and poor old Clovis, and Tom, and the old folks

at Farinder, and Margaret, his sweet friend. The nearing home, the thought of meeting them, made it real. But Elsinora! if Elsinora had been dead, then he could have lived, ay, and in spite of sadness, have loved what remained; but with Elsinora another man's wife, no. The contemplation of it was a scourge; it gave him sharp pain instead of the melancholy in which he had been dreaming; it quickened his pace and darkened his brow. His death must prevent that possibility, his sacrifice must be the means somehow of achieving her freedom. Some way must be found; there must be no delay; he would say farewell to his dear ones, and then to his enterprise.

The old village of Farinder lay quiet in the afternoon sunshine as he passed through it. The broad grass-grown street was almost

empty. Outside the post-office Squire Longfield, on horseback, was talking to the Misses Mosscrop, maiden ladies of the village. Dick would gladly have avoided them, but was pulled up by a loud 'Hullo' from the Squire.

'Damned, if it isn't Dick Malory.'

Whereupon the Misses Mosscrop exchanged glances which conveyed to each other the mutual assurance that they had heard and deprecated the expression, but were agreed that allowances should be made for old-fashioned gentlemen like the Squire.

'And you're not hunting, sir?' said Dick, after the ladies had been greeted, and had retired to the post-office.

'No, my boy; I had a spill last Tuesday in a forest run, and my joints are as stiff as a crab's. I'm getting old. Funny thing, only

last night Peggy and I were talking about you, and here you are. When will you come over and dine? Not to-night, of course; they'll want you at home. To-morrow? Wednesday? and mind, bring the whole family. Oh, you were over in Ireland with Tom. I've just had a telegram; he'll be here to-morrow, too.'

Dick started. 'Will he? How jolly! I forgot to ask how every one is.'

'Couldn't be better. Humphry getting too fat; but why doesn't the fellow ride? The dear old man is just the same as ever, and all mine are well, thank God. My sweetheart, Nan, is a little too pale to please me, but she gets prettier every day. Keep your eye on her, and don't let her throw herself away. Young Leonard, the second one, the barrister, seems rather fond of looking in

at the Priory lately, and he's a fellow I can't abide. But I think she can take care of herself. She's mighty dignified when she likes.'

'Give my love to them all,' said Dick; 'I may walk over to-morrow.'

'Good-bye, my boy,' said the Squire; 'and, look here, go to bed early, and eat as much as you can while you're down here. You don't look up to the mark, eh? Too much work, eh? or late hours in London, or what?' The Squire rode off, with the hearty laugh of one from whom life has no riddles.

Mr. Wrixon and Nan were walking up and down on the path in front of the house when Dick appeared at the gate below. When he was alone the old man's face was stern; when Nan was at his side it was always softened, just as the cold, gray stone of the Priory grew mellow in sunshine; in

many ways he was like the old building. In the midst of placid talk—he was telling her things of long ago, in the time of her own mother's youth—she sighted her brother and pointed, 'Look!' then she jumped the terrace bank, and rushed down to him at a pace which was very unusual with this demure maiden.

'Dick!' she cried, with her arms round his neck. 'My dear, dear old boy; my dear, dear old boy!'

It was hard to bear; his eyes were dim as they walked together to the house, hand in hand.

That evening he could not disguise the pain at his heart. His attempts at cheerfulness broke down. Nan looked at him wistfully from time to time, and said little. Humphry was assured that some sorrow of

which they knew nothing had overtaken him. He and Dick smoked a pipe together after the others had gone to bed. It was the hour when Humphry had been most given to indulge in speech, but to-night he said little. He spoke of Nan and Mr. Wrixon and old friends, but asked no questions. The old basset-hound lay between them on the hearth in the flickering firelight. The flutter of the wind in the great chimney had a kind, familiar voice to Dick. How good it would have been to live through the mellow years in this old corner of the world, if only love and life might have remained together.

'Humphry,' he said, just as he was going, 'life is very difficult.'

'You take it so seriously, old chap,' replied Humphry.

'It is a world in which no path is clear, not even the path of duty. Happiness and duty cannot dwell together, and love must be sacrificed to honour, or honour to love. Nothing seems worth having except that which we may not possess; and it is only when what we have is taken from us that we know that it was good. It is a hopeless mixture, a wild scheme, Humphry, a sad comical creation, and I enter my protest against it.'

'Oh, it's all right,' said Humphry, 'if you don't take it seriously.'

CHAPTER II

THE BALL

THERE was dancing at the Manor-House; the whole country-side was invited to say farewell to a gallant young soldier departing to the wars; for the Soudan campaign had begun, and Tom Longfield's regiment was under an immediate order to embark. The ball was also to commemorate Nan's formal presentation to the world. It is an important event, this 'coming out'; it proclaims to all that the young lady is now ready to undertake the responsibility of love and housekeeping. A young man must work

for the badge; with much difficulty obtains he these fetters; he goes from the irresponsible to the responsible position through examinations or on an office stool; but a maiden in one night dances from one to the other. It is well.

It was a windy October evening. Humphry Wrixon and Dick walked over together to the Manor-House after dinner. Dick could not resist speaking the thought uppermost in his mind.

'Supposing,' he said, casually, 'you wanted to die for the good of your race at the present time, how would you do it?'

'Do not make sport of your uncle,' Humphry replied.

'Well, not you, then, but any man who felt capable of it.'

'He couldn't do it. Heroism isn't wanted.

Fancy our ordinary man offering his life to his country. It reminds me of your Socialist friend who offered his property in Ireland to the Government, in order that they might nationalise it, and they wouldn't have it.' Humphry chuckled at the recollection. 'Of course,' he continued, 'if he were very anxious to do a little private heroism he might join a fire brigade, and, after a gallant rescue, perish in the burning ruin; or he might study the meteorological reports, and when he saw a "V-shaped depression" approaching our islands, go down to the coast on the chance of getting a seat in a lifeboat; or he might offer himself to a hospital for the doctors to try their new medicines on. You see it would depend so much upon how he was situated; if, for instance, he had a life interest in property,

which reverted on his death to a charity, the noblest thing he could do would be to commit suicide, and many poor people would reap an immediate advantage.'

'Exactly,' said Dick. 'There is no room to-day for great deeds which stir the heart of a nation. Joan of Arc would be put in a lunatic asylum.'

'Very properly,' said Humphry.

'Lucretia would live, and Collatinus would go to the divorce court. Latimer and More would have reasoned out their position in magazine articles. We reckon progress by exports and imports. We are more comfortable perhaps; we have exchanged heroism for comfort. If we endeavoured to be heroic, we should become ridiculous. Well, Humphry, can you suggest any more heroic death than the new medicines?'

'No, sir. This, thank God, is, as you say, not a heroic age. The heroism has been done for us in the past, and we are permitted to contemplate it artistically treated. I mean the old sort of heroism. There is a new domestic sort, which does not prance and plunge and rush madly onward, but pulls a heavy load quietly uphill.'

'Made a drudge of, in fact.'

'Not necessarily. It seems to me that, in the present day, a man who would serve his fellow-men must be content to do so by living for them, not by dying for them.'

'Yes,' assented Dick. 'I think that's right, if in doing so you are not afraid to lose your life. A soldier can still be heroic in the old sense.'

'Oh yes, here and there; but modern war is not heroic. Look at the Egyptian War

just over. Some of our men may have behaved very well, and the Arabs were simply glorious, but what heroism was there in shooting down savages with machine guns for the benefit of Egyptian bondholders?'

'Yes, I know; but this new campaign seems to me quite a different thing.'

'What? The rescue of Gordon which our chivalrous Government has put off until it was driven to it by fear of the ignorant voter. Yes, this promises to be exciting.'

'I wish to God I was with Gordon in Khartoum to-night,' said Dick.

'You will find waltzing and supper far more comfortable,' Humphry replied, somewhat startled by his nephew's speech.

The heroic was left behind with the darkness of the windy night when they entered the bright house and heard the sound of music.

Generations had danced in the inner hall at Farinder. In old times of minuet and country dance, when the dark walls were less brilliantly lighted and the guests were fewer, it might have been more picturesque than now; but in spite of modern improvements and the monotony of waltzing and male attire, a dance in the long hall, with its recesses and deep windows, retained a suggestion of the old world, and the girls were nothing behind their ancestresses in beauty or picturesqueness of apparel.

Humphry was presently to be observed in a recess, hemmed in by chaperons. His imprisonment caused great delight to the Squire, and its duration became the subject of a bet between him and a neighbour. But Humphry showed no signs of uneasiness.

'All the people one knows are here,' said

chaperon number one to a friend, 'and all the people one does not know also. Some very odd-looking people—the Longfields *are* so friendly. That, my dear, is Sir Henry Fusp, the new judge; one of his sons is at Harrow with Gerald.'

'Yes, I have seen him,' said number two; 'a dear boy. Did you notice Margaret Longfield's dress? How well she is looking! I really think she must be twenty-four; at all events, not a day less than twenty-three; and why she is not married amazes me; there is money too.'

A third lady addressed Humphry. 'It is really a charming sight, don't you think, Mr. Wrixon? It makes one feel quite young again to watch the young people. And you ought to be dancing yourself, you know; but you are such a recluse, one never sees you

anywhere. Let me introduce you to my friend, Mrs. Clapton Crosby. Anna, Mr. Wrixon knows all about literature, and I am sure he will be interested in hearing about your dear girl's poems.'

'I should so much like to talk to you about them,' said Mrs. Crosby, 'and ask your advice. All our friends think she ought to publish, and I want to know the right way to set about it. Gladys has talent, I know, though I suppose one ought not to say so. Our vicar says it is genius.'

'It is generally easy to distinguish them,' said Humphry. 'Are your daughter's poems comprehensible?'

'On the contrary, Mr. Wrixon, even her own father confesses to being baffled.'

'Well, madam, there is not the slightest doubt she has genius.'

'I am so glad to hear you say so. Now, do tell me, are you acquainted with any good publisher?'

'One,' said Humphry, 'if he is still in the business. He is here to-night. My nephew is acquainted with him.'

'Dear me, how odd! I did not know publishers were people one could know—except in business, that is. But nowadays it is quite fashionable for gentlemen to go into trades, is it not?'

'There he is,' said Humphry, grinning, 'standing near the fireplace.'

'What! the tall distinguished-looking man with the discontented expression?'

'Yes. Publishing, I fancy, is a depressing business.'

'Oh, do bring him over! I should so like to introduce him to Gladys.'

'I shall be delighted,' replied Humphry. 'The whole thing might be settled at supper, and arrangements made as to the profits and so on. I see he is going to dance with Miss Longfield, but I will seize him for you directly.'

'That is really kind of you. Now, tell me—you seem to know everybody—who is that most extraordinary-looking person who is dancing with poor dear Brunhilda Way? Mary,' she whispered to her friend, 'do look at the creature who is dancing with poor dear Brownie.'

'That gentleman,' said Humphry, in his most solemn tone, 'is Mr. Clovis Cloudesley Shovel, a rising artist, a most conscientious dancer, a friend of mine, madam. He is staying at our house. I will endeavour to secure the publisher.'

Humphry escaped.

Clovis was suffering horribly; so was his partner. His heart had been fluttered by an invitation to the ball, sent at Dick's request; he had taken some dancing lessons with the object of qualifying himself to dance with Margaret Longfield, and when they met, and he was just summoning up courage to ask her to waltz, she had introduced him to Miss Way and left him. It was his virgin effort—a desperate ten minutes. The burden of having at the same time to remember the step, to carry out the instructions of his mistress to keep his right knee unbent, to glide, to avoid giddiness by not looking on the ground, and to recognise the existence of his companion, were almost overwhelming. When he felt that he ought to make an attempt at conversation he found

himself internally counting one, two, three, four, five, six; and then he trod on her toe, and blushed and apologised. He was not at all sorry that his partner said she was tired and proposed to sit down during the remainder of the waltz.

Nan was in great request.

'By gad, Wrixon, my little sweetheart is the prettiest girl in the room,' said the Squire. Mr. Wrixon looked at her with affectionate pride.

'She reminds me very much of her mother to-night, Longfield.'

'Then her mother must have been a deuced handsome woman. She is like Dick —a little — when he doesn't look so infernally grumpy. Can't make out what's the matter with the fellow. But Nan, she's the girl for me, and between you and

me, Wrixon, I wish she'd take a fancy to Tom.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Wrixon, rather testily, 'she's a child.'

'She's a very dignified young woman, sir. Well, we can't arrange these things as we want always, but Tom's a good boy, Wrixon;' and Mr. Longfield walked away rather hurt at the apparent want of response from his old friend to his wish for a closer bond between the families.

Tom was, for reasons not apparent, very cross. Humphry found him standing at the door frowning furiously.

'You look serious, my boy,' he said; 'thoughts of the coming fray? It must remind you of the Duchess of Richmond's ball before Waterloo; the vivid imagination may almost hear the roar of

the field amid the sound of revelry by night.'

Tom growled out a laugh, and asked him if he knew the gentleman with whom his niece was dancing so much, and who had just passed with her.

Humphry named him as a young barrister of promise.

'Dismal-looking prig,' said Tom.

'Really,' said Humphry, 'I think he is rather beautiful to look at. I fancy he is *épris*. He came down on purpose for the ball, I believe.'

Humphry thought he had spied marks of jealousy in Tom, and it delighted him to incite it further. Why was not Tom dancing with her himself, instead of running down those who did? He was to be treated as a laggard; his love, if it existed, required

to be pricked with jealousy, as a stubborn ass which the small boy persuades forward by placing a furze bush beneath its tail.

Tom at last found his way to Nan.

'I'm afraid I have nothing left,' she said; 'you came in so late.'

'I had important business,' said Tom, deeply offended.

'Uncle Humphry said you must be sharpening your sword,' observed Nan, laughing.

'Then Uncle Humphry may mind his own business.'

'Well,' said Nan, 'don't be cross, Tom, for I have some dances left, though I might have filled them up. Here—' she gave him her programme.

Humphry had been observing; he saw that there had been a quarrel and a recon-

ciliation. He was pleased; these two persons in his comedy were doing their parts. They would marry each other some day, without a doubt, and every one would like it, and they would like it themselves. His thoughts turned to Dick. A country dance was in progress, for the Squire always insisted on the introduction of a few of these old-fashioned measures. Humphry noticed that whenever Margaret met Dick and had to give him her hand in the stately progression of the dance, she gave him also her brightest smile, and that Dick was ready in response. What spectre of the mind could live in the sunshine of that smile? Dick was undoubtedly a troublesome and provoking actor; the sweetest girl in England was here for his winning, and a whole happy life possible for him, and he was restless, doing

nothing worth doing, prating about the heroic and so forth. He believed there must be some hidden cause; perhaps it was connected with the mysterious woman whom he had called the marplot. Some amazing information on the perplexing theme was about to be furnished to him.

Tom was going away next day. A remark made by Dick during the evening, which implied that they would never meet again, had filled him with apprehension. Dick in his absence might break through the conditions on which his life depended. Tom remembered that he was pledged to secrecy about the duel, but the burden of the secret was more than he could stand. He suddenly made up his mind to give some warning to Humphry.

'Come into the library for five minutes,'

he said shortly before supper. 'I have something particular to say.'

'Hullo,' thought Humphry, 'we're going to propose. This is very proper; the honourable young man approaches the lady's guardian before declaring his passion. Good.'

When they were alone Tom began uncomfortably, 'Look here, Humphry, Dick's in a mess. It's a secret, and I musn't tell, but I'm going away, and I want you to keep an eye on him.'

Humphry laughed heartily. 'I keep an eye on all of you, Tom.'

'It's no joke, I assure you; his life depends on it. I tell you it's serious. You must see that he doesn't go to Ireland again, and that he doesn't see Miss Chillington. I can't say any more, but if he does go

over again, or sees her, it will cost him his life.'

'What!' cried Humphry, 'has he been espousing the cause of Ireland? Is he connected with dynamite, treason, The O'Beamish?'

Tom found himself compelled to tell Humphry the whole story. When he left him to fulfil his engagements in the ballroom Humphry remained alone in a state of utter amazement. Presently he lighted a cigar, and went out through the library on to the terrace.

'Well,' he said to himself, "I set myself to contemplate a comedy, and behold I am let in for melodrama.' He began walking up and down, and endeavoured to regard the situation seriously. Its comical aspect was uppermost in his mind, but he dismissed it.

From what Tom had said, and from his knowledge of Dick's impetuous nature, he saw that it would be necessary for some prompt measure to be taken to prevent the possibility of disaster. Some counter excitement was necessary; he must not be allowed to remain inactive; he must, above all, be removed from the chance of seeing Miss Chillington. He made a plan, and returned to the house anxious for further speech with Tom. He found him at the porch saying good-bye to some people who were leaving early.

'You must make Dick go to the Soudan with you,' he said.

'By Jove, I wish I could,' said Tom, 'but how?'

'He must go as a war correspondent. Since we last met half an hour ago, Tom, I

have started a newspaper for this purpose, *The Farinder Weekly Post.* You have friends at the War Office. You must get him permission to join the expedition. It is the only thing for him. He'll work off his fever, he'll be away from the influence of this wild Irish girl. He'll come back glad of the chance of enjoying life.'

'You're a brick, Humphry,' replied Tom, delighted. 'You're just the man to help one in a mess. The excitement will be just the thing for him. He'll be able as a correspondent to go up to the front at his own pace while I am moving slowly with the regiment. Here we are only ordered away now, a reinforcement, and we may be too late for the fighting. It's perfectly maddening to be here to-night not started. The time Gordon gave is nearly up. There's a reward offered

to the regiment that gets first to Korti. And the Nile falling. It's a fearful race. O Humphry, my dear fellow, what is the love of any woman in the world compared to work like this?'

'Not worth thinking of,' assented Humphry.

'By the way,' said Tom, 'Mr. Wrixon wants Nan to be ready to go home at one o'clock. She wants to stay to the end, you know. I wish you'd work it. She wants the fun of walking home with you and Dick, and I thought of coming with you part of the way.'

'I'll see what I can do,' replied Humphry, grinning. 'You go and tackle Dick. I must have some supper.'

'Right you are,' said Tom; 'I believe he's with Margaret in the conservatory as jolly as

a sandboy; they've been chumming all the evening. If only he'd fall in love with her now—and they used to be tremendous sweethearts when they were kids,—he'd never want to go near the other girl, and it would be all right.'

'Oh, it will be all right,' replied Humphry.

LIBRARY

CHAPTER III

THE DESERT

England, like the spread-bellied, middle-aged gentleman who has ceased to use his fists but finds himself at times called upon to cuff unruly small boys, is frequently to be seen puffing and panting in different parts of the globe, in castigation of delinquent little rebels. The mental joys and anxieties consequent on increased girth are exacting; nevertheless, on the occasions when the muscles also have to be given play, a survival of the old fighting instinct, and with it something like enthusiasm, is apparent.

About Christmas in the year 1884 the thoughts of our people were, in the intervals of commerce, turned with an approach to excitement, towards the town of Khartoum, and the little army which was toiling thither up the Nile. The posters of the evening papers on the muddy pavements of London were scanned eagerly by citizens going homeward; old soldiers made an extra call at the clubs to see the latest telegrams, and let off an additional curse at the Government and the War Office.

It was but a month or two previously that our Guards had been cheered through the streets on their departure. The weakest kneed of city clerks had felt a sudden glow of the warlike at the sight, and during the rest of the day was aware that he had a soul above the making out of invoices. Even the democratic

working-man, who complained that these expeditions were a burden to the nation and especially to his own class, was not unmoved.

It was an exciting race, the issue full of doubt. The progress of the army up the Nile was slower than had been anticipated; the falling river and other unforeseen difficulties had had to be encountered. The first regiments had only arrived at Korti, a distance of four or five hundred miles by the great bend of the Nile from Khartoum, and the date until which the besieged city was first said to be safe had expired. The other regiments were still toiling among the cataracts, and among those which had been the last to start, and were farthest from the front, chafed that which possessed Tom Longfield.

In a letter, received from him at Farinder

on Christmas Day, he bitterly complained of his bad luck, entering into judgment against the whole expedition, and prophesying disaster. Dick, he said, would be in the fun; he had gone off headlong to the front with a reliable Arab guide and good horses; he would be travelling miles while they went inches. He spoke of the splendid way in which the men worked, and gave some description of the lonely desert, and the great river with its sand dunes and straw villages. The letter was read aloud after dinner at the Manor, the Priory folks being there also, and the health of the boys was thereafter given by Mr. Longfield and responded to by Mr. Wrixon in mutually complimentary speeches, moving to every one, in Mrs. Longfield's case even unto tears.

'We may still be proud of the old country,

Wrixon,' said Mr. Longfield, 'and proud of our own boys, God bless 'em.'

'We can feel, sir,' replied Mr. Wrixon, 'that they have gone to the rescue of the man who went to the rescue of the honour of his country.'

Even while these loving hearts at home were occupied with thoughts of him, Dick was preparing for a desperate undertaking. He had reached Korti a short time previously. The Guards with their camels, and detachments of various regiments, had already arrived; the Black Watch and others were close at hand. A state of uncertainty existed in the camp; there was no definite news from Khartoum, but the latest message had said, 'Come quickly.'

To follow the course of the Nile round its great bend would take another five or

six weeks, and rumours were circulating of a march across the desert, to be made by a column of picked men. It was a daring scheme, involving disconnection of the force with its base, and the facing of unknown perils in the desert, possibly disaster, annihilation; but it was the fervent hope of every man in the force that this plan would be carried out, and that he would be amongst those chosen.

Dick was restless with excitement. Excitement had dispelled his gloom and brought out his old enthusiastic spirits. His ride to the front had been exhilarating, its speed and his disregard for the dangers of the road had given him a reputation for recklessness, and a good reception amongst the officers in the camp at Korti. He was beginning to fret at the waiting and uncer-

tainty, and was fearful as to his own chance of being allowed to accompany the desert column, if the march were decided upon. As a pretext he had obtained an appointment of correspondent to an insignificant provincial newspaper, but in addition to this qualification, a special permission would be required from the commander-in-chief to enable him to go to Khartoum with the force. Every hour of uncertainty made him more restless. Things at Khartoum might be even then desperate; Gordon might not know how far the relief force had come; it might be important that the desert march should be made to save the city. Then a daring scheme entered his head—the scheme which no man could have formed who was not utterly careless as to whether he lived or died; nay, rather, it was the scheme of

one who courted death. He resolved to attempt to reach Khartoum himself. The conception filled him with the same joy which he had felt on that starry night on the moor, when the idea of heroic death had first come to him. And here it was no longer an idea but within reach. If he succeeded in getting to Khartoum and returned alive, the news he brought might be the means of saving the city; if he died in the attempt, no finer death could be possible for him.

He made inquiries among the Arab adherents of the camp, and obtained the services of a man, a native of Khartoum, who was eager himself to reach the city if possible, as he had left there his family and what little property he possessed; and now the chance of a companion and a large

bribe readily induced him to join the enterprise. The horse which had borne Dick so well previously had had several days' rest since his arrival at the camp and was sound and reliable.

The news that he was about to start one night across the Bayuda desert for Metammeh—he did not mention his further project of reaching Khartoum—was received by his friends with incredulity. Then, when conviction was established and the idea became familiar, much chaff followed after the custom of young Englishmen when there is desperate work on hand. They would probably never see him again, but it is no unusual thing for Englishmen to risk their lives in search of adventure. No one attempted to dissuade him, every one wished him luck. His friends took care that he

should dine well that evening, and liberal health-drinking followed. Some light-hearted young subalterns accompanied him to the edge of the camp, singing songs.

The atmosphere of comradeship and cheerfulness and good hope was pleasant to think of an hour or two later, when he was out in the lonely desert in the moonlight, and the camp and the brightness of its life was left behind.

The night air was cool and refreshing. They rode on rapidly for several hours. The silence was profound. In the moonlight the desert was visible for miles around them, a level waste dotted here and there with patches of scrub and mimosa. The stars were dim in the moonlight. In front, over the city which they sought, stood the Southern Cross, and low in the west the

Great Bear's familiar form brought memories of the dear native land, the green island in the wintry seas. In this lonely ride across the desert, before its hardship and danger commenced, Dick communed with his heart. He summed up the days of his life, the hopes of long ago, the failures, and the love which did not fail, and he was content and could say, 'It is well.'

'You know what we have to face,' he said to the Arab; 'you are brave, you do not fear to die.'

'I do not fear,' he replied, 'but you English officers are braver than are we. We are in love with death, but you are in love with life. We are true believers, and know when we die bravely we shall go to Heaven; but you are unbelievers, and you do not even believe in your own false

Heaven, and yet you fight bravely and do not fear to die. But we are in love with death.'

'Yes, we are in love with life,' said Dick. 'But some men among us prefer honour to comfort, and will give their lives for their fellows or their country. Such are the men of our army which we have now left. Such a man, the greatest among such, is Gordon Pasha to whom we go; but others among us face death less nobly because shame would overtake them if they lived.'

'Your people are strange,' said the guide, 'they live for one another, and in fear of one another; to win the love, or to avoid the laughter of your fellows, you will do the same thing. But Gordon Pasha is greater than his race. He heeds not the

voice of any man nor minds their reproach, and he believes in his God, which is better than to disbelieve, even though his God is a false god. I am for peace. My tribe will not follow the Mahdi. Gordon Pasha has been good to them. God permits the unbeliever to do his work.'

'And you have seen Gordon Pasha?'

'Ay, when he was with us in years past and brought peace among the tribes and wealth to the poor, and freedom to the slave. I have seen him in my own city, in Khartoum, where the streets are dark with the shade of green trees, and the cool wind blows up from the blue hills. He is different from your race, which holds revel and drinks wine and believes not in its own heaven; but he takes not wine and

his faith is great in his God, and he puts not his trust in woman.'

Towards morning they reached some wells at the borders of a tract of grass country, and halted to rest the horses and take a couple of hours' sleep. They were undisturbed by any sight or sound of the foe. Before the moon set, they had discerned, dim in the distant plain, two camels journeying southward, but when morning dawned there was no sign of them. Next day they rode until noon when the sun became overpowering and drove them to the shelter of some trees for rest until after sunset. They rode through the night. At dawn they saw a troop of Arab horsemen travelling in the same direction as their own, and a change of plan followed: instead of making for the Nile at Metammeh, they

now kept more to the westward in the direction of the Bayuda wells, with the object of approaching Khartoum from the desert, rather than along the Nile where the Mahdi's forces were likely to be gathering to oppose our troops. The travelling would be more arduous by the latter course, and it would give them no opportunity of replenishing their store of provisions; but on the whole the chances of the desert seemed better than those of the river. They had food for eight days, water they would have to seek on the way. The Arab calculated that Khartoum might be reached in seven days' steady riding; he had little apprehension about the desert journey, but he looked forward with constant anxiety to their position on reaching the neighbourhood of the city. It was known that the Mahdi's troops

swarmed about it: to get through appeared an impossibility. His only hope was that they might conceal themselves, and wait until a sortie was made and then join the returning force. He said frankly, that if they were taken he should join the ranks of the Mahdi.

Travelling became slower and more wearisome each day. The horses began to feel the strain; the distances between places of shelter and water grew longer. The loneliness of the desert, both by day and night, became oppressive; the sense of isolation from the world was complete. Dick grew impatient and constantly questioned his guide as to the distance yet to be travelled, but the Arab remained undisturbed.

On the fourth night after their start they came among some low hills covered with savas grass and scrub,—a pleasant change

after the plain. They found abundant water here and determined on a long halt. The Arab was satisfied that they had now completed half their journey.

During the night they were disturbed by intermittent sounds of the beating of tom-toms. They concluded that one of the desert tribes on the way to join the Mahdi was camping for the night near them. To avoid discovery they set off on their journey again as soon as the moon had set, and next morning found themselves once more on the open plain.

In the distance, coming towards them, was a man on foot; he was walking painfully and showed signs of great fatigue.

'He is not one of my race,' said the Arab, contemptuously, as he approached; 'he is a cowardly Egyptian. He is dying of thirst. He brings news.'

When the Egyptian had drunk from the Arab's water-skin he told his tidings. He was one of the garrison of Omdurman. Omdurman had fallen three days before and he had escaped. Since its surrender the condition of Khartoum had become desperate. If the city were to be saved, the English must come at once.

The man's report was evidently true. Dick saw but one course open : to return to Korti at the utmost speed with the information. He gave the poor Egyptian his water-skin, and after the Arab had made clear some directions about the route, they left him.

Then the ride became exciting ; the stimulation of a race was in it ; the fate of the city might depend on their speed.

'Oh that our horses were fresh, fresh as

when we started,' cried Dick. 'We could ride night and day without a check. But what if the horses fail us?'

'There is good work in them yet,' said the guide; 'they are good horses and will go bravely till they die.'

He gave them the whole of the water in his own water-skin, relying on reaching springs where he could replenish it a few hours later. Then they rode on again in silence, and Dick blessed his comrade in his heart for what he had done.

Before noon they reached the wells near the hilly ground where they had camped on the previous night. A group of acacia trees shaded the springs.

'Let us rest here until sunset,' said the Arab, 'and refresh our horses, then we will ride again until the dawn.'

Dick slept profoundly. The sun had set when his companion called him. His sensations, on awaking suddenly and looking out across the desert over which twilight was spreading, were strange. For a moment he could not understand where he was. Then he aroused himself and laughed. He was refreshed by his long sleep, the evening air of the desert was exhilarating, he was excited by the thought of the work on hand. The mystery of the dim waste region and the deepening skies, the danger and doubt, the thought of the beleaguered city behind him, surrounded by the wild tribes of the desert, of the ride before him and all that might depend upon it,—all his surroundings thrilled him with the romance which he had grown to think unrealisable.

They rode that night harder than they had

ridden at any time since they started. Towards morning the Arab's horse began to go lame; at daybreak he could hardly walk. They reached the shelter of some palm-trees with difficulty and remained there gloomily for some hours. The wells at which they had hoped to rest during the hot hours were still out of sight, and there was no water here. As the horses were suffering badly. they determined to push on slowly, leading the crippled horse; his feet were sound and his lameness came from exhaustion. After working bravely for a couple of hours in the blazing sun, and when the palms about the wells were just visible on the horizon, the poor beast fell down, and died almost immediately. Dick looked at his guide in dismay, and even the imperturbable Arab was not unmoved.

'You must go on, my friend,' said Dick; 'there must be no delay about the tidings. You must take my horse.'

'I can find my way to safety in the desert—the desert is my home,' said the Arab. 'You would perish, you must ride on.'

'I know not the way, I should not find the camp if I rode,' he answered; 'and if our message is not delivered the city is doomed. You must go forward. I will take my chance, and you may come back with help to me.'

'It must not be,' said the Arab. 'Let us go forward together slowly and ride by turns.'

'And the city will be lost. I tell you, my friend, I care not for my life, it is of no account, but I care that the message be delivered swiftly. You are but three days' ride from Korti. My horse is sound. Tell

me fully of the way and the distance between the wells and the direction which I must take. I am strong, and I doubt not I shall reach the river.'

They went together as far as the wells, where the Arab remained for some hours. Dick gave him a note for Tom Longfield which briefly told what had happened. His good comrade embraced him with emotion and they parted. Dick watched him until he was out of sight, then fatigue overcame him and he fell asleep.

For two days and two nights, resting at intervals when an opportunity of shade was afforded, he travelled across the desert without meeting a human being. The stars were his only guide. Now that his companion had left him, the loneliness of the journey through the silent nights was supreme ; but the mys-

tery and romance of his surroundings had almost ceased to appeal to him; hardship and suffering were beginning to tell; the physical wants were eloquent. He had rushed into danger and sought for death, and now that death was near—slowly advancing on him—he doggedly prepared to struggle against it and make a fight for life. The ideals and dreams of the past, almost love itself, dwindled to insignificance in that physical struggle. He had done nobly for once in his life, he had achieved the heroic, but no pleasant reflections about this rewarded him. In his fancies he bathed in flowing streams, drank deep, or lay in a hammock swinging in the branches of a tree above an English meadow. He began to crave for the sight of a human being, for an enemy rather than no one, so appalling

were the long hours of the silence of the desert.

On the third day after the departure of the guide he came upon the track of camels and horses. A dead camel lay on the sand; and he found a bag of dates, a rifle, and other things, which he concluded had been dropped hastily in flight, scattered about at intervals on the ground. The dates were a godsend, as he had nearly come to the end of his food. A little water still remained in the skin which the Arab had left with him. A dark object on the sand a few hundred yards distant attracted him, and on coming near he found it was the body of an Arab boy of six or seven years old. The child at first appeared to be dead, but on Dick's approach he rose on one elbow; in his right hand he held a short

dagger which he raised defiantly; his large dark eyes gleamed with a fire of hatred. For some minutes Dick stood looking at him in wonder. It was a strange picture—the worn-out man contemplating with kind pitying eyes the Arab child who was too weak to rise, but defied him to approach; and round these two the wide waste of leagues of desert.

'Poor little beggar,' said Dick. Then he tried to make himself understood in Arabic, a few words of which he knew. He said: 'I am your good friend, my child.'

The boy still looked defiant; but a minute after he sank to the ground again, exhausted. Dick put an arm beneath his head and gave him some water and a little brandy. He discovered that he was injured in the thigh, and bound up the wound, which

was still bleeding, with his handkerchief. It was the middle of the afternoon, the sun was powerful, there was no shelter at hand; but a group of palm-trees was visible a few miles distant. Towards these he walked with the boy in his arms. His burden, instead of making his progress more difficult, made it easier; the comradeship of a human creature gave him new life. To ease the suffering of the child, if possible to save his life, became for the time his sole thought. In spite of his own fatigue and thirst, he would not drink a single drop of the water which remained in the skin. Happily when the trees were reached water was found also. He bathed the boy's face, and washed his wound, and laid him down in the shade, hoping that he might sleep; then he drank some water and ate some dates and lighted

his pipe. He sat with his back against a palm-tree watching the friendly smoke curl up from his pipe. Now and then he glanced over towards the boy. The little creature was wide awake, his large brilliant eyes were fixed on Dick; they had a strange beautiful expression, all the antagonism was gone.

Before long Dick fell asleep himself and did not wake until midnight. He determined to go on and travel as far as possible before the hot hours of the next day. The child drank some water, but would eat nothing; he made no opposition when Dick took him in his arms, and a few minutes after starting he fell asleep. For some hours, stopping now and then for a short rest, he walked on. At dawn the boy awoke and spoke some unintelligible words; his face showed that

he was suffering pain; still he would eat nothing, but drank a little water.

'My poor little chum,' said Dick, with a kind smile, 'we are both of us down on our luck. I am afraid we shall soon come to the end of our travelling.'

The boy seemed to know he was saying something affectionate; he put his arm round his friend's neck and smiled for the first time since they had met. So a bond of brotherhood was established between these two.

Dick toiled on with steps gradually growing feebler, until the sun was high. On ahead he could see a line of wooded hills; but the intervening miles of desert were bare and treeless. He looked at the distant hills and at his little friend gloomily. His strength was almost exhausted, but he pulled himself together and went bravely on.

After a while the child's mind began to wander and a change came into his face. Dick feared the movement of walking might cause him suffering; he laid him on the sand and rested his head against his arm, stretching his coat above him to shelter him from the sun. Thus he lay until he died an hour or two later. Dick kissed his poor little comrade, and made a grave for him in the sand and went on again. His own strength was almost gone, he believed his end was near; but the thought produced no emotion—his sensations were numbed. Still he went doggedly on, and at last reached the shelter of the hills. As he lay down he heard the sound of a distant gunshot, but he was too fatigued to be aroused by it and fell asleep immediately. He slept for three or four hours and awoke somewhat refreshed when

it was growing dusk. He could hear the beating of Arab war-drums, and the frequent sound of gunshots, which told of the presence of the enemy in numbers, and raised the hope that the English force was near. While he was considering what course it would be best to pursue he saw three Hussars gallop past, and at the same time several shots rang from the riflemen of the enemy concealed in the scrub and long grass. The Hussars turned out to be the advance vedettes of Colonel Stewart's relief force, which was being withdrawn to the zerebah where the column was camped for the night.

Dick was so much excited by what he had seen, which told him that the relief column was near, and that his guide's message must have been delivered, that he raised a great shout as the Hussars swept by. Then he

determined to follow the direction they had taken in the hope of finding the English camp before dark. It was a choice of dangers between doing this and remaining concealed during the night with the enemy all around him. The camp was closer than he had expected; a turn in his path at the base of the hill showed him the zerebah not a quarter of a mile distant on the open plain.

The wisest course for him to have taken would have been to have concealed himself after marking the position of the zerebah, and waited until darkness came before attempting to reach it. But he was excited and impatient; his own safety was a thing he now hardly considered, and without hesitation he walked straight towards the zerebah. He was soon observed both by the enemy and the English camp; he became a mark for some of the

Arab riflemen ; bullets hummed past him, and several struck the sand unpleasantly near ; but he walked on as steadily as if he had been on a turnpike road. He was conscious of wishing to cut a good figure ; if he were killed, this is what he had come here for, and he would be killed in a dignified manner and not when running away from the enemy. He felt a positive satisfaction as the bullets sighed past that he was in view of English friends, and that if he were lost the news of how he fell would be reported at home and Elsinora would hear of it. But he came to the zerebah untouched, assuming an air of indifference as he strolled up.

'By gad! I never saw a man behave better under fire,' said one officer of many campaigns to another who had been watching him approach. 'Who the devil can he be?'

'Oh, one of the correspondents, I expect,' replied the other. 'They are always trying to show us that a civilian can stand fire as well as a soldier.'

When Dick got into the zerebah and was recognised, he was at once surrounded by friends; his assumed stoicism almost broke down in the joy of the meeting; but he managed to keep up appearances, said he had had a damn bad time since he saw them last, and so forth. His Arab guide, it appeared, had safely arrived with his message, having met the column on the second day after it had started; the staunch fellow had since started again with two horses to seek him in the direction he thought it was most likely he might be found; his heart glowed when he heard it. In a few weeks of danger he had seen everywhere the nobility of

human nature, which he had failed to find in the world of civilization and progress. For here were men who a few years ago had been loafers in the slums of cities now doing heroes' work; and others whose aim of life had formerly seemed to be only their own pleasure, and the bond of fellowship between them as flimsy as the common follies which brought them together, now ready to sacrifice their lives without a complaint, and bound together by the ties of true comradeship.

After reporting himself to the general, who had expressed a wish to hear his account of the meeting with the Egyptian soldier, Dick was entertained at supper by some of his former acquaintances. Food and a bottle of champagne revived his strength and spirits. Every one in the camp seemed

gay; the real business of the campaign had begun, and there was every possibility of a fight next day.

During the whole evening the firing from the hillside and the bushes continued —most of the shots happily flying over the zerebah, but some finding their mark. There were several cases in the hospital, and two or three men had been killed. Lights were not allowed in the camp, and there was no moonlight, but in the clear starlight the sides of the hills of Abuklea were discernible; and within the zerebah the shadowy lines of the men lying on the ground muffled in their blankets, the officers and sergeants moving quietly about, the gaunt forms of the camels, showed dark against the lighter background of the desert sands and the sky.

When Dick lay down, muffled in the

friendly shelter of an ulster, he was unable to sleep. He first began revolving in his mind all that he had been through during the last week; then his thoughts travelled homewards, and he pictured himself returning to Farinder and seeing them all assembled round the fire in the old dining-room; and then he remembered that he was not to return, and he was troubled, and his thoughts were all of Elsinora, and his memory of their last parting, and the courage and honour and loveliness of his lady. He was disturbed in his meditation by the talking of three officers who were lying near him, and who were also unable to sleep,—indeed the continued firing and the sound of the tom-toms of the Arabs in all directions around them, made sleep a difficult thing for any one. They were

speaking of one of their number who had been killed in a skirmish that afternoon —a young officer of promise and a great favourite.

'How keen he was to come out,' one of them was saying; 'he exchanged you know from the —th with Gibson, who was glad enough to stay at home.'

'Oh yes, I know the whole story, poor old fellow; he was as plucky as you find them; but, as he said to me once, "when there's a woman in the question, the only thing you can do is to run."'

'I suppose there was something in the gossip about him and Gibson's wife.'

'Yes, rather; every one knew it. Gibson is not the sort of man to inspire enthusiasm in a woman, I should think. Anyhow, poor old Caruthers did the plucky thing, and got

out of the way, and she has her husband safe, and Frank is dead.'

'Hard lines,' said the third.

Dick started up. 'Caruthers,' he cried. 'Did you say Frank Caruthers?'

'Yes. Did you know him?'

'Yes. I was at school with him.'

No more was said. It was nothing unusual, but Dick's heart was touched. He was his first hero,—the boy who had got him into disgrace, for whose dishonesty and for love of whom he had accepted humiliation. And after all he had not been mistaken in his hero; it was not a misfortune to die such a death; the story gladdened his heart.

And next day, without doubt, there was to be fighting; the wells of Abuklea would not be passed without a battle. This also brought

him a strange content as he lay between sleeping and waking. He would fight to-morrow as a man who is in love with death ; and if he died, it would be in the service of his country. And now until the rising of Venus, the signal with the Arabs for beginning a battle, he might sleep. He was weary ; he had run into every kind of danger which had offered itself; he had courted death like a lover, and death, notwithstanding, had been denied to him.

CHAPTER IV

CONNIE DISCOVERS A CONSCIENCE

The campaign in the Soudan with its tragedies and disappointments was over. The disgrace of the winter was forgotten; indeed our greatness, Imperial and Colonial, was being demonstrated to us in an exhibition at South Kensington.

It was a Saturday evening in July. London was enjoying the fulness of her season in familiar ways; her chosen children were on view in the park, and a few of her despised children were among the spectators. Mr. Chillington and Elsinora were to be

seen with the former, Robert Strong and Connie with the latter. Strong usually found the scene a stimulating text for denunciation, but this afternoon his Socialism had an unwonted mellowness. He was better dressed than usual, and looked a fine specimen of the stalwart British mechanic.

'That's how these working-men do it nowadays,' said a languid young gentleman to a friend as they passed; 'they dress their women up like ladies. And by Jove, I say, isn't she a beauty?'

Connie overheard the last remark, and could not resist rewarding the speaker with a smile.

She was very gaily dressed, but her appearance was somewhat changed. She had lost her abundant black locks, though

her hat concealed the fact that her hair was cropped short all over her head. She had recently suffered a term of two months' imprisonment for stealing a bracelet from a sister actress.

As far as it was in a man's power to win her, Strong had succeeded. His faithfulness to her through everything had at last touched her heart. After her conviction, Eustace, who was previously almost ready to offer her marriage, had disappeared, disgusted with her, ashamed of himself. He and Strong had met outside the court after the case was over. Strong, with a heart full of pent-up misery and indignation, had smiled grimly when he had seen him, and fired a parting shot at him. 'I suppose you don't find it pleasant to think you were making your puny love to a thief,' he said; 'but, whatever

she is, you and the like of you are not fit to black her boots.'

It had probably been jealousy rather than covetousness which had prompted her to steal the bracelet. She stated that she had intended to restore it, but nobody believed this. She felt the disgrace of her position keenly. She knew she would be shunned by those who had called themselves her friends, when she came out of prison. She felt as much humiliation as her nature permitted. Her prospects on the stage were destroyed; she had no home; her pride forbade her either to ask Dick for money or go to Strong, whom she had previously neglected; the most degraded career possible to a woman was her outlook. But at the gate of Pentonville prison on the morning of her release she was met by Strong. He had

been waiting for hours; he treated her with as much chivalrous attention as though she had been a noble lady in distress. When they were alone together she had broken down completely for the first time in her life; whatever she had said then of affection and repentance had been genuine.

Strong had been promoted by his employers, and had just accepted an offer made by them to act as manager to a branch factory which they were establishing in New South Wales. Connie had readily agreed to accompany him. The generous side of her nature had really been aroused, and she was anxious to try what she could to undo any wrong she had done not only to Strong but to Dick. She was anxious to communicate with Dick, and to let him know that he need never fear her troubling him again,

but she could find no tidings of his whereabouts.

With eyes on the look-out for attractive carriages or riders, Connie presently perceived Elsinora and her father.

'My aunt!' she exclaimed, 'the Irish princess!' as they drew up their horses close to where she was sitting, and entered into conversation with a friend.

She was alert to hear what was said, and gathered that Mr. Chillington and his daughter had just returned from abroad, and were in London for a few days. The hotel was mentioned, and an invitation to dinner given. Elsinora looked radiant; there was laughter at something she said as they rode away. Connie indicated her to Strong with excitement.

'This is the chance I've wanted,' she said,

'and I'll call to-night. I had my fun with her, but I'll let her know how things are. I made her believe we were really properly married. My! I wonder how she'll take it. If she cares for him really, there's no knowing what she'll do. She seems jolly enough, laughing there; perhaps she don't trouble about him.'

'He troubles about her, that's enough,' replied Strong, looking after Elsinora; 'and here's a chance for a woman to prove her love which one in a thousand don't get. They talk and talk about being ready to die for a man, but they won't risk displeasing society for him.'

'I'm not sure about her,' Connie mused.

'If she really loves him, Connie, do you think she'd make your going to a registry office with him a bar? No, she'd be proud

of the chance of defying this rotten conventionality for his sake. She'd be proud she had no legal hold on him. And that's our case. You're not afraid I'll chuck you because we're not married?'

'Chuck me!' cried Connie, with a show of indignation. 'Better mind as I don't chuck you,' but she touched his hand with hers as she spoke. 'Come along; let's be on the move. I've settled to go and see the Irish princess to-night after she's got her dinner.'

Mr. Chillington was satisfied that there was little fear of his daughter marrying O'Connor. She had told him of the engagement, and he had known her nature too well to oppose it directly. His plan was to divert her attention; he devoted himself to her amusement. He had the entrance to society

of distinction, and she became his constant companion. She made him additionally welcome; she was admired as much as he could wish, did him infinite credit, and seemed personally gratified. He foretold that from this circle a man of mark should stand forth and transplant the flower from the Irish potato garden to a garden befitting it.

There was certainly nothing in her manner to indicate a troubled mind. At dinner that evening she was full of gay spirits. Their party included Sir Compton and Lady Dando and their niece Miss Mansfield of Newnham College, Norton Tristram, and a Mr. Sinclair, a gentleman of political promise. Letters had been received from Egypt in the afternoon; one from Nevil Chillington spoke of an immediate return to

England; one from Blaise Dando made allusion to Dick. Elsinora had heard it read before dinner with a beating heart.

'You remember,' he said, 'a fellow called Malory, Longfield's friend, the man who once spent a night at Somerford, who came on a donkey—he was out here playing the lunatic. They say he tried to get to Khartoum by himself—on a horse this time, not a donkey. Afterwards he fell in with the flying squadron, and nearly got killed at Abuklea. I don't see the force of correspondents and nondescripts being allowed to mix themselves up as they do more and more every war with the forces. It ought to be stopped; it's not fair to the soldiers for these outsiders to go in front of them and take the pick of the fun. But they all say Malory was a good fellow, and frantically

reckless. As soon as he was out of hospital, he was up to his larks again; he went into the river after a private who got capsized in one of the boats in the rapids, and though he ought to have been drowned, he got ashore, and landed his man too. I believe he's gone home now.'

The letters were alluded to at dinner.

'Your boy's letters seem to have been like mine,' said Mr. Chillington, 'full of disappointment about the campaign. Such grumbling I never heard.'

'Just the same,' replied Sir Compton; 'these youngsters are hard to satisfy; they know too much; they criticise their generals and the Government and every one.'

'We make too much of young men,' said Mr. Chillington; 'they won't listen to us, but we listen to them. We take far more

interest in our sons than our sons take in their fathers.'

'Well, I think that very natural,' said Lady Dando.

Mr Sinclair laughed. 'And I suppose the race takes more interest in its descendants than in its ancestors.'

'Oh, I don't agree with you,' said Elsinora. 'Do tell me, now, how you can take any interest in your descendants? You do not know anything about them — they are shadows. But your ancestors are real people; you see their portraits, and the houses they built, and their tombs, and you hear tales about them, and you know them.'

'Ah, Miss Chillington,' said Tristram, 'that is family pride. If your ancestors had been shopkeepers instead of these terrible

"kings of Connaught and viceroys of Tralee," you might not find them so attractive.'

'I suppose it is a matter of race and temperament,' said the politician. 'The Orientals seem to take more interest in their ancestors, the English in their descendants. The Chinese spend their pocket-money in decorating the tombs of their forefathers, the Englishman lays his up for his children. He desires to found a house. Take Sir Walter Scott; he loved the past, but his greatest desire was to found a family.' He spoke precisely with the air of settling the matter finally.

'But tell me, Mr. Tristram,' Elsinora persisted, 'how can you take any interest in your descendants whom you don't know?'

'Imagine them, Miss Chillington.'

'The difference,' said Miss Mansfield,

'seems to me like that between your interest in the road you have left behind you, and the unknown road in front of you.'

'I am a *cul-de-sac*,' observed Tristram.

Lady Dando laughed, and shook her head reprovingly.

'Our conduct,' said Mr. Chillington, 'will bear fruit in our descendants, but does not touch our forefathers.'

'Now you have hit the mark,' said Sir Compton. 'Our parents try to shape us, and we try to shape our youngsters; we prefer thrashing to being thrashed, eh, Chillington, what?'

'But my husband is the kindest of parents,' Lady Dando hastened to state; 'and I am thankful to say our boys have not given us a moment's anxiety.'

'I hope the mischief will not show itself

later on,' said Elsinora, with a sly look at her father; 'steady boys, I have been told, are so apt to break out when they are fifty.'

'Oh, what a horrible thought, Elsinora. Now do tell me you are joking; that is the way with you Irish girls, we never know when you are serious.'

Tristram laughed gaily; Mr. Sinclair smiled serenely; Sir Compton hastily assured his friends that their boys were considerably worse than their mother knew.

'Compton!' said Lady Dando.

'Nothing serious, of course—no harm in them, you know,' he said, apologetically.

'I should like my cousin Blaise to hear this conversation, immensely,' said Miss Mansfield.

'Dear Blaise!' sighed Lady Dando, reassured. 'Well, I suppose there are some

things we need not inquire into. The world is different for men and women; the books, for instance, which our boys may read, would not always do for our girls. Sir Compton is very particular, Mr. Chillington; he likes me to cut his books for him, and he always insists on my cutting the French novels upside down.'

'My dear Lady Dando,' said Tristram, 'your husband pays you a great compliment; he shows at once his faith in your liberal judgment, which allows you to permit to him an indulgence which you deny yourself; and it also shows that he considers you free from curiosity, and is confident that you would not practise the art of reading upside down.'

Sir Compton laughed rather uncomfortably; conversation followed on recent literature.

'And when is your great national poet going to appear, Miss Chillington?' asked Miss Mansfield; 'you want one to express your wrongs.'

'I am afraid he would not find a publisher,' she replied; and turning to Tristram, 'I once asked an English poet to remedy our deficiency, and come over and see the sorrow of the land, and make a poem for us, and he promised—and he did not fulfil his promise.'

'Ah, Miss Chillington!'

'Seriously! Mr. Tristram.'

'Well, I will come still, if you will let me; but mind, I cannot tell which cause the poems will side with; and supposing it were hostile, should I get shot for it?'

'Well, you must be prepared. Have your deathbed saying ready; all poets have a deathbed saying. Now tell me, have you

some beautiful last word ready, Mr. Tristram?'

Every one laughed at Tristram.

'Irish poetry may not reach the high-water mark from our point of view, Tristram,' said Mr. Chillington; 'but I think it succeeds in expressing the national sentiment and wrongs very fairly. There was in my youth an old beggar who used to stand on Carlisle Bridge in Dublin, and beg in song. He used to say:

> A bit of duck or cold goose-pie,
> Something to dhrink, for in troth I'm dhry;
> An empty sack can't stand agin a wall,
> And the devil a bit I had this day at all.

Old Zozemus, as he was called, seems to me as the voice of Ireland itself. You will notice the condition of the appetite, and the modesty of the request.'

'A witty people, a witty people,' remarked Sir Compton.

'And they are simply tremendous in their war songs,' continued Mr. Chillington.

'Oh! the French are on the sea,
Says the Shan-van-vogh;
Oh! the French are on the sea,
They'll be here without delay,
And the Orange shall decay,
Says the Shan-van-vogh.

The poet, you see, is thoroughly Irish in his rhymes as well as his sentiments, and demands that the word "sea" shall be pronounced "say"; and then that charming lyric, "Pat Molloy," how much it teaches us!

Me pockets they are empty, but me heart is full of joy,
For old Ireland is me counthry, and me name is Pat Molloy.

What possible greater happiness could fall to the lot of man? Even empty pockets

cannot damp his jubilation when he remembers his nationality.'

Elsinora laughed; she was well accustomed to her father's banter about Ireland.

'Yes,' she said, 'an Englishman could never have been proud of his country with empty pockets; he loves his country apparently because it has filled them.'

After dinner Elsinora received a note from Connie to say she must see her, and would come at nine o'clock. She made an excuse for not accompanying her party to the theatre, and awaited her visitor impatiently. Connie arrived punctually, and was met by Elsinora in hat and cloak in the porch of the hotel.

'I received your note. We cannot talk here,' she said. 'Come down this way; we can walk along the embankment.'

She was trembling. She was no longer the lady whose real feelings were hidden beneath brave spirits and gay manner. Connie was quite at ease.

'You and me'd better be friends,' she said, 'it's for the interest of all concerned. I wasn't quite straight with you when we met before, but I suppose I'm a bad lot. You see I wasn't brought up like you, with a pa a churchwarden, and that.'

'You've some news? Something important to tell me?' Elsinora asked.

'P'r'aps you'll think it's important, p'r'aps not, I don't know. Well, do you know, I'm a reformed character. I'm almost respectable. I say, how you walk? We've been taught to hold ourselves and posture and all, but it's natural to you. I never saw any one walk so easy.'

'I remember you are on the stage,' said Elsinora, absently.

'I have given up my profession,' said Connie, 'I am going abroad. I saw you among the toffs in the park this afternoon. I was there too with my husband.'

Elsinora thought she meant Dick. She was unable to speak. Connie heard her catch her breath. She enjoyed the situation.

'Don't be upset,' she said, 'I didn't mean Dick, though he's my husband on paper. I meant Mr. Strong, you've heard of him. We're off to Australia together next month. I never told a soul but yourself about that registry office business, and I never will. I'm to be Mrs. Robert Strong, "the wife of our respected fellow-citizen" out there.'

'Does he—does Mr. Malory know anything about this?' asked Elsinora, eagerly.

'No, that's one thing I wanted to see you about. Do you know if he is coming home? or where he is?'

'I heard he was on his way home, but I don't know.'

'Then you and him don't write. I wish you did for his sake. But you're respectable and he's a paper husband. So of course we must be discreet, eh?'

Elsinora endured her familiarity without comment.

'Well, I've come to-night as your friend and his,' continued Connie. 'I'm fond of him and always was and always will be, and I've done him no good and I'd like to make it up if I could. He was kind to me from the first, the very first time we met when I bolted from the circus, and afterwards we saw you—that was the first time he saw you too—and then

he married me because he wanted to reform me.' She laughed, but suddenly asked, 'Did he tell you anything about it?'

'Yes,' replied Elsinora, 'he told me everything.'

'About our going away together and Strong coming down and all?'

'Yes.'

Connie was disappointed, she wished to have communicated this herself.

'And in spite of all that,' said Connie contemptuously, 'you let him go. Oh it's fine to be respectable. *I* know, "What will people say?" "What will papa say?" Now don't be angry, it's only my way. I see by your look you don't think me worth getting angry with.'

'Say what you like,' replied Elsinora. 'I am not angry. It was good of you to come

to me. I am glad to hear about you and Mr. Strong. I know he is a man a girl may be proud to love.'

'He never did a mean thing in his life,' said Connie seriously. 'The things I've done are the things he hates most, and still he loves me. There were plenty of them admired me, I tell you, but I believe he admired me more than any one.'

'When a brave man really loves you he is worth doing anything in the whole world for,' said Elsinora; 'and Mr. Strong is not like the others you spoke of: he doesn't love you for your face, he would love you if you were—'

'Don't you believe it,' interrupted Connie, 'and I wouldn't like him to either. Looks means a deal with men, whoever they are. You know it yourself, I'm positive, with looks like yours.'

Elsinora could not help laughing.

'I'm speaking very free to you,' Connie remarked, 'but you see the circumstances are peculiar. It's not for me to make suggestions, but in case there's anything between you and Dick, don't you fear any trouble from me.'

'It is not that. I know you are really generous and good,' cried Elsinora; 'but nothing can make any difference—now.'

'Then,' said Connie, 'that tale Bob got, I think he told him himself, that you was going to marry some one else, is true?'

'No, no, it is not true. I am not going to marry anybody. Don't ask me questions. Let us go back, you have been kind to come.'

They were standing on the Embankment looking out on the dark river.

'Look here!' said Connie, 'this is my wedding-ring.' She took it out of her purse and held it up. 'I threw it away once and I found it again. Now watch!' and she tossed it over the parapet into the water.

CHAPTER V

LOVE AND LIFE

Dick's fever had burned itself out: calm replaced his unrest. His first passionate despair at the loss of Elsinora had been subdued in recent scenes of counter excitement, and the strong love of life, inseparable from a vigorous nature, remained. The thought of death, which when he had wooed it as a lover had filled him with exaltation, now that it had rejected him as such, was horrible. And there was no necessity to die. He had courted death: now life was wooing him. In the hot Egyptian June the memory of

England, of English meadows cool in the evening, of the voices of dear companions grew eloquent. Every day of his homeward voyage strengthened his hold on life. He was like the convalescent who after past fever rejoices to sit in the sun and feel the gentle growth of returning strength. The accumulated evils of years seemed to have withered away in the recent fire of thought and danger through which he had passed. The world was restored to him, recreated, made fresh as the earth which the thunderstorm has cleared. And as desire for life grew it began to press reason into its service. He had striven to die for Elsinora, and at the same time for England: he had failed. How should he now find a way to serve either by death? And was not Humphry right when he said that a modern man who would serve

his fellows must live for them, not die for them? Reason reminded him of his sister and others who loved him. And Elsinora? it was her emphatic wish that they should not meet. She saw in their separation the chance of perfecting the ideal of love which would be sullied by any attempt at realising it. If he went to her now and sought to dissuade her by every means in his power from marrying O'Connor, he might fail, and his life would be forfeited. As an honourable man he could not think of such a course unless he was prepared to face the penalty of death. If she found that it was impossible to marry O'Connor, his going to her would still be of no avail: he could not marry her. The whole business of the duel began to look ridiculous to him, as it had looked to Humphry. His

love of life was stronger than his love of a woman.

But there were times, also, when he did not feel this—times when the thought of her beauty, the memory of her perfect love, the fancy of her arms about his neck, brought him torture in contemplation of her as O'Connor's wife. She might grow attached to O'Connor when he became her husband; or that grand ideal of love which she had cherished might also fail. One look from her, one touch of her hand, even a message of love from her, might easily have overturned all his philosophy, and made him eager for death again if death were necessary to free her. But the influence of her presence was wanting, and the love of life was gradually and surely growing. When he arrived in England at the end of July, it was

to life, not death, he looked forward. He made up his mind that, unless she was in need of him and sent for him, he would not go to her. He had no definite plans, but for the present he decided to go to Farinder, and sit in the sun and find rest after stormy seas.

With Elsinora it was otherwise. Well as she loved life, she loved Dick far more. The thought of him was an undercurrent of all her thoughts; her gaiety was on the surface; she was playing a part, and doing so helped her to bear her pain. When she was alone she was living over again every hour which they had spent together. She had given herself to him; no bonds of marriage could bind them closer than she felt herself bound. She had known that her soul was his when he had kissed her, and

now to marry another man, to suffer his endearments, was impossible. To have done so would have been an unnatural outrage on herself, worse than suicide.

O'Connor had returned from an unsuccessful mission to America. He at once saw that there was a gulf deeper than ever between him and her. He behaved generously, and made the termination of the engagement far easier for Elsinora than she had anticipated. All his work had been in vain, his health broken, his hopes ruined ; but he accepted his fate like a man. His conduct touched her, wounded her, made her condemn herself. She longed to make some sacrifice in return, as much to satisfy her own sense of honour as to show her gratitude to O'Connor. This had been the reason for her silence to Dick, and this had

decided her to go abroad with her father so that the chance of their meeting might be removed. She resolved that she would not even write to him to let him know that she was not to marry O'Connor. A word from her might bring him to her, and that must not be. But in spite of the relief which came to her in the freedom from her engagement, she could not be happy. She would have been miserable but for the strength of her love, and her firm faith that Dick loved her as constantly and deeply as she him. Every morning her first thought, every night her last was of him, and she doubted not that at the same time his were of her. She understood his silence; she had asked him to go away and not see her again, and he had obeyed her wish. He had faced death; he had showed that he loved her better than

he loved his own life. This was her comfort, this made the future endurable, made life beautiful still, though it could not behappy.

Thus did these two lovers find ease. One in the love of life: one in the ideal of love. And yet it needed but the clasp of hands to destroy their security, to threaten again the barriers. For neither of these could there be any permanent rest apart from the other.

CHAPTER VI

THE MARPLOT

On the morning of the last Sunday in August an unusually large congregation converged on Farinder church. It was tacitly understood that there was to be a sort of thanksgiving service in celebration of the victory which had been achieved on the previous day in the great annual cricket match with Wayland. Wayland and Farinder were rivals in everything, but the cricket match was looked upon as the final test of strength, and Farinder, after three successive defeats, had won a famous battle.

Mr. Middleton, the rector, was a cricket enthusiast. During the last half-hour of the game, when his son, the Farinder captain, and Tom Longfield were at the wickets together, and two runs a minute were needed for the win, his excitement had been amusing; and in the last over, when the suspense was ended, and Tom made the winning hit, he was overpowered. He found it necessary to be alone, and retired hastily behind the pavilion. He could not of course deliberately ask people to come to church to return thanks; but before leaving the field he had said, 'I hope I shall see you to-morrow morning,' in a context which marked his meaning.

Farinder understood and responded. The eleven,—all save one,—their relations and their admirers, which meant the whole

parish, were on their way to the church. All save one of the eleven, for Wixey, the grocer's son, whose contribution to the success was a minus quantity, since he had not only failed to score, but had also neglected to catch a gentleman who afterwards made forty runs,—Wixey refused to leave his bed.

Professor Wintersea, now visiting at the Priory, was also walking towards the church with his friends, but he proposed to leave them at the porch and take a walk during service. His mind was occupied just then with a mathematical problem,—the construction of a formula which should enable a man to determine before marriage the probability against his becoming the father of twins; and the Sabbath peace of the fields was favourable for reflection.

'How pleased Middleton will be!' said

Mr. Wrixon as they crossed the park, and could see from its slopes the unusual numbers making for the church. 'When a clergyman identifies himself with the sports and pleasures of the people he can do wonders. By the way, Humphry, I have been telling Dick that the game of cricket is an unworked field for sculpture. He must try his hand on it.'

'Capital,' Humphry agreed. 'I believe there's money in it. The Surrey Club keeps a poet to celebrate its heroes. Why shouldn't it keep a sculptor also? There would be an immense demand for statues of Lohmann bowling, or Abel at short slip.'

'Abel, bless my soul!' cried the Professor. 'Ah yes; of course. I was thinking for the moment of the book of Genesis.'

'He's talking nonsense,' said Mr. Wrixon.

'I don't mean statues of individual players, but ideal representations. I specially noticed a man called "point,"—the whole pose of the figure, alert, expectant of the ball, a wonderful subject! And the bowler just in the act of hurling the ball. And some one made a catch with one hand thrown back high behind his head, that would do still better.'

'And somebody dropped a catch,' said Nan, 'and Miss Morscrop thought he had done something so clever. "Oh," she said to him, "*do* let me congratulate you, we *all* saw you. You almost caught somebody out."'

Even the Professor could join in a laugh at this depth of ignorance.

'I hope you will think seriously of my suggestion, Dick,' said Mr. Wrixon. 'You

must back me up, Wintersea. What did you think of his work?'

On the evening before, Humphry had shown the Professor a number of sketches which Dick had made formerly. They had caused him considerable embarrassment, as they were chiefly studies from the nude. He had turned them over very rapidly with the comment, 'Ah, yes, the human figure, very necessary of course, quite indispensable, and no doubt beautiful also.' He was not at ease in the discussion of artistic themes; and now, after expressing his hearty approval of what he had seen, gave the subject a statistical turn.

'It may interest you to know,' he said, addressing Dick, 'that the profession you have adopted is favourable to longevity. The artist lives long, lawyers and clergy-

men are also high on the list, the publican and the butcher low down. The butcher dies young, Wrixon.'

'And you think the cricketer a good subject?' asked the old man.

'Very promising, indeed. I hope you will embrace it, Wrixon. I was much fascinated by the contest, and the scene was very charming, — the sunshine, the happy village youths bounding across the green sward in pursuit of the ball, encouraged by the spectators,—a happy scene. I wish I were young enough myself to take part in such pursuits.'

'Ah,' observed Humphry, 'you and I have got far beyond the cricket stage. There is a gradation of games, the seven ages of sport. Football and cricket to begin with, then lawn tennis, and, as age

advances, golf and a tricycle, and finally archæological expeditions.'

'You have forgotten amateur photography,' said Dick.

'Quite right, Dick, that should come near the end. Why, here are all the Longfields. And look at Tom, isn't he splendid? Tall hat and frock-coat, and Margaret looking brighter and prettier than ever in another new dress. Ah, if only I were twenty years younger!'

'As if she'd ever have married you,' said Nan.

'My dear Anna,' said the Professor, 'it can be demonstrated that the probability is largely in favour of a young lady accepting as her husband the first agreeable man who seriously woos her; and I assure you that, as a young man, your uncle was much

sought after, and I see no reason why he should not marry still. As my esteemed friend, Professor Hex of Oxford, once remarked of another, your uncle's "coefficient of matrimoniality" is considerable.'

'Of course it is,' said Dick, laughing. 'After this we shall expect you to get married instantly, Humphry.'

'Well, you all seem very merry,' said Margaret as the two parties met.

'And what a gathering,' cried the Squire, joyously. 'Splendid weather for the harvest, Wrixon; and here's my friend, Nan, with the cricket colours flying in her hat,—these girls think of nothing but cricket,—and how are you, Professor Wintersea, not seen you, sir, since that night we all dined together in London two years ago.'

'I remember, a most agreeable evening,'

answered the Professor. 'I recall it distinctly. I wish our friends would come up to town oftener.'

'I feel perfectly lost there now,' said the Squire. 'It's not the London I knew long ago. It's like some great American place; it don't seem part of England. Look at the hotel we were at with the lift and the damned foreign waiters, and the white-faced bald-headed young men who smoke cigarettes in the hall, and stare at you, confound 'em, as if you were a curiosity.'

'But we liked the electric light, it is so cool compared with gas,' said Mrs. Longfield.

'A very just remark,' observed the Professor.

'And after all, the lift was a great convenience.'

'Yes,' said the Professor; 'it is interesting to observe how largely the discoveries of science have been utilised in the service of comfort.'

'Comfort, fiddle-de-dee,' said the Squire. 'Give me candles for comfort. Candles were invented by Alfred the Great.'

'Ah, indeed, King Alfred.' The Professor received the remark with the same polite gravity which he would have given to it if it had been more profound and truer.

'Yes, of course, sir. I thought it was well known. He used 'em as clocks.'

On the church pathway they fell in with other acquaintances. As Margaret Longfield and Dick, who were in front of the others, passed Lady Denham and Mrs. Clapton Crosby, these ladies exchanged the lifting of eyebrows.

'How well Margaret Longfield looks. I wonder if there is anything between her and that devil-may-care young Malory. I shouldn't wonder a bit, and probably her parents don't like it. He is a rolling-stone, and not well off.'

'I have heard that he is clever and might do well,' said Lady Denham.

'I hardly know him. He's a fine young fellow. I like a tall man—at least—' she remembered that Mr. Clapton Crosby was short, 'only if he has other attractions.'

'Here comes his uncle.'

The Professor had just detached himself, and was footing it rapidly across the fields. Humphry joined the ladies.

'Ah, Mr. Wrixon, how do you do? Quite a surprise to meet you here.'

'Indeed, I was at church last Sunday.

I find the new curate's intoning very soothing.'

'I sometimes fear we think almost too much about accessories in religion,' remarked Mrs. Crosby. 'We ought not to be dependent on such things as a voice. But I confess myself that I find a musical service a great help.'

'Mrs. Longfield gave us a delightful picnic yesterday,' remarked Lady Denham. 'It was quite a pleasant change to see cricket after so much tennis. We were dreadfully excited, Mr. Wrixon. I did so feel for the poor men when they had to come out.'

'But I was so angry with that man who hit the ball right into poor Mrs. Longfield's tea-tent,' said Mrs. Crosby. 'It was so thoughtless of him. Did you happen to notice who it was?'

'Yes,' replied Humphry, 'his name is Green; he is under-gardener at the Manor-House. I am very much distressed; his thoughtlessness bodes ill for the future comfort of our housemaid.'

'Oh, really! Is he *occupé* in that direction? are they engaged?'

'Not precisely. They—ah—coambulate.'

'They *what?*'

'That is, "walk together,"' explained Humphry. 'In their station of life I understand "walking together" to be a relationship preliminary to betrothal. It has some advantages.'

The ladies went into church. Humphry lingered outside the porch until the others came up. He glanced at Dick and Margaret, who were also waiting in another part of the churchyard, and noticed with satisfaction that

Dick seemed to have a good deal to say to her, and that her face was full of animation and happiness. Knots of village boys saluted him and passed into church with clattering feet, old village people paused a moment to exchange greetings with him, the jubilant peal of the tower, rung for the victory, was changed for the note of a single bell to warn in the loiterers. Humphry joined his brother, and went in, at peace with all the world.

It was a warm day and the church windows and doors were left open. From the churchyard the intoning of the curate, and the responses of Farinder, could be clearly heard, and from within the church the sounds of the wind in the yew-trees and of lowing cattle were clearly audible in the pauses of worship; the farmers might even distinguish

the familiar voices of their own cows. There was peace within and peace without. The congregation knew that they need fear nothing disturbing in Mr. Middleton's sermon. He never startled his flock, as priests of coarser mould, by calling them sinners ; he was far too well-bred a gentleman to do so ; the service provided for that, —they were permitted to call themselves miserable sinners in the Litany : they were doing so, it was enough.

Humphry enjoyed being in church when he had the energy to get there. His corner of the pew which belonged to the Priory was a good place both for meditation and observation. It was in the south transept, and thus gave him an outlook on the body of the church and the faces of the people ; and when the north door was left open, as now, he got a

pleasant peep of the churchyard and of distant hillside and wood beyond. At all times he loved to hear the droning of the organ, to see the familiar faces of the village folk; or watch, as the sunlight shifted, the varied colours from one of the stained-glass windows follow each other across the recumbent figure of a marble knight on a tomb in the chancel, the inscription on which related that therein slept Sir Wynkin Wrixon Blakeney between his two wives. Exceeding peace filled his soul this morning. He was meditating on his comedy. All his views were being justified. Dick was at his side, respectably clothed and in his right mind, less restless apparently than he had been for years. From what he had said to Tom Longfield, he appeared to regard the duel himself as a ridiculous affair, and had probably got over his infatuation for

Miss Chillington. That young lady, he had heard, was almost immediately going to Canada with her father. He was sincerely glad of this, for he knew Dick well enough to be certain that his present calm was rather the outcome of a mood born of reaction after excitement, of renewed joy in life, than of his real nature. His nature was impetuous and restless, and if he saw or heard from Miss Chillington, he might instantly become rash. Since his return he had noticed that he and Margaret Longfield had been a good deal together, riding or walking, as in old days; and he believed that at last Dick's eyes were opened, and that he knew the best thing in the world for him would be the possession of this sweet girl's love. He glanced complacently at the altar-steps, and in fancy saw them kneeling

together, and beside them another couple—Tom and Nan,—village children waiting outside with bouquets, tears of joy in the eyes of Mr. Wrixon and Mrs. Longfield, himself ready with an avuncular blessing. It was all to be as he had prophesied. 'Life is a good comedy,' he reflected, 'the love of a man for a woman may be great, but his love of life itself is greater. That is why life is comedy. It is tragic only to the man who does not understand the value of life nor see beyond the horizon of an episode. We shall have them all happy and commonplace and satisfied with themselves and with each other, the inevitable end of a comedy. And yet at one time it almost broke down.'

In the midst of his complacent musings, Humphry's eyes, which were absently resting on the patch of sunlighted churchyard

visible through the open door, were suddenly attracted by a flash of bright colour. A second glance showed a gaily-dressed young lady who had seated herself on the square erection of stone which marked the tomb of the Longfields. The monument was a high one, and her legs were dangling; there was a mischievous smile on her face. Humphry recognised her; it was Connie. He grew very uncomfortable. It was she who had previously paid Dick a mysterious visit; her coming boded no good. She might in some way disturb the existing peace.

Connie was leaving England with Strong in a few days. She had come down to see Dick on a generous mission. She had telegraphed the day before asking him to meet her at the railway station. The telegram had been delivered on the cricket-field to

young Middleton during Dick's innings, and had been pocketed by him and forgotten. Connie was annoyed that he had taken no notice of her message, and, hearing that he had gone to church, mischievously decided to meet him at a time when her presence might make him uncomfortable.

Blick, the sexton, from behind a yew-tree, was also suspiciously watching the strange lady. He too recognised her; it was the bold woman who had come to the inn the night before, and had sung songs in the bar to the men, and who would have danced—and it was impossible to say what she might have done besides—if the landlady had not given her the alternative of going to bed or being turned out of the house.

At last the sexton could stand it no longer; he approached her bravely.

'Dus' knaw, young 'ooman,' said he, 'whose vault thee'st making free with?'

'How d'ye do?' remarked Connie.

'Well, it's Squire Longfield's.'

'A pal of mine,' replied Connie; 'I'm just waiting till church is over to see some friends. This is a very nice seat, old boy. Now come up and sit down beside me and look pleasant.'

Blick withdrew hastily and watched from a distance in a terrible frame of mind. He knew she was lying. The Squire's tomb had been desecrated; he himself had been tempted by a strange woman. He longed for the conclusion of the service and speech with a churchwarden. Here was a story for the inn.

Mr. Middleton's sermon was nearing its end. Connie had descended from her perch,

and was walking up and down the path, still watched by Blick, when the Professor returned from his walk to join his friends. He saw Connie, and in an instant recognised her. Trembling with fear, and hoping that he was unnoticed, he walked rapidly in another direction, not venturing to turn his head. Footsteps on the path behind him told him that he was pursued, and he quickened his pace until it was almost a run. But Connie had no intention of letting him escape. She caught him up with a merry laugh.

'Well,' she said, 'don't you remember me? You're not going to cut me?'

'Dear me! God bless my soul! most extraordinary,' gasped the Professor, stopping. 'A very beautiful morning; very agreeable weather.'

'Yes, isn't it? And why aren't you in church? We're both of us naughty to be out here, but it's pleasanter. Now, let's sit down on this flat stone by the wall in the sunshine, and have a nice little talk till they come out.'

The Professor saw the church before him with its open door as a sanctuary; he was meditating entering, but agitation deprived him for the moment of the use of his legs, and he sat down helplessly beside Connie.

'Well,' she said, 'if this isn't funny! To think of meeting you. And I haven't seen you since that evening at Mr. Tristram's. I hope you liked my lady friend's picture in the Grosvenor that you promised to go and see?'

'Really,' said Mr. Wintersea, rapidly, 'I

am afraid I did not see it. Some very particular engagements, a press of work, in fact, made it necessary for me to deny myself the pleasure.' He forgot the treatment he had received from Connie in his shame at having been guilty of the discourtesy of overlooking a promise made to ladies.

'You must have thought us a funny lot that night,' she said, assuming great seriousness. 'I've no liking for such evenings myself, and I often wished since as I could meet you and have a bit of sensible talk; there's so few men one can talk to seriously. Now you mightn't think it, but I'm very fond of mathematics and that.'

'Really!' exclaimed the Professor, more at ease. 'Ah, now I remember, you made a very profound remark at the time in con-

nection with a woman's nature and the symbol π.'

'Oh, that was nothing,' answered Connie, 'my little studies must seem very poor to a man with a mind like yours. I expect you're always thinking about deep things. Now, when I met you just now I'm certain you were working something out.'

'By Jove!' cried the Professor, with a pleased laugh, 'you are quite right. You have really a very extraordinary power of observation. I have indeed been engaged on a little problem, a formula——' He hesitated.

'Oh, do tell me what it was?' she asked.

The Professor remembered its nature, and blushed. 'I fear,' he stammered, 'it would hardly be one fit for a young lady.'

'Oh,' said Connie, reassuringly, and with

real interest, 'do tell me. You need have no hesitation, I am a married woman.'

'It is—it is hardly worked out,' he said; 'it is difficult to explain.' He looked wildly at the sky. 'A most seasonable day, is it not? I enjoyed my walk in the fields greatly, —the meadows and the milch cows, the verdure and the little flowers scattered about over the country.'

Notes from the organ proclaimed the end of the service; there was a clatter of hobnailed boots on the pavement, a rustle of dresses, then talking and laughing outside the porch. Connie jumped up and forgot the Professor, who stole quietly out of the churchyard and set off homewards rapidly. Every one looked at her curiously; some of the village people who had seen her at the inn the night before recognised her

and grinned; she and Lady Denham stared at each other with almost equal rudeness; the doctor made a note of her beauty, Margaret Longfield's maid of her dress. But Connie was quite at ease under the scrutiny, indeed her face indicated that she was enjoying it. Margaret Longfield and a little brother passed. The contrast between the two girls was striking. Perhaps on a stage, with accessories of paint and footlights, Connie might have looked more beautiful than Margaret; but here in the sunshine her beauty looked mean in comparison. To turn from Connie to Margaret might give the same impression as one receives who comes out of a theatre during the performance on a summer evening, and, after the dazzle of artificial light and the glitter of stage scenery, sees a

sunset over the hills beyond the spires of a city.

Margaret gavé her a glance and passed on. Dick and Humphry followed. Humphry was keenly watchful. Dick, when he saw her, started and changed colour. He hesitated and stopped, hardly knowing what he did. Connie herself seemed at a loss for a moment, but she turned to Humphry.

'Good morning, Mr. Wrixon; you have not forgotten me?'

'Ah no,' replied Humphry, 'I remember. I hope you are well.'

She turned to Dick. 'Did you get my telegram, Mr. Malory?'

'No. What telegram?' he asked.

'Oh, didn't you? how curious! Well, I must see you; it's important. Good-bye,' she said to Humphry. 'The Professor

and me have been having such a pleasant chat.'

'I'll follow you directly, Humphry,' said Dick, fearful of a scene. Connie might do anything outrageous. She might publicly claim him as her husband. He led her across the churchyard to a gate which opened on a quiet path through the fields. He knew the eyes of half Farinder had been on him, and his discomfort was extreme.

'Don't be angry, Dick,' she said. 'I never can help being cheeky. I have something important to tell you—about some one you care for.'

'Who?' he asked, impatiently.

'I'll tell you presently. But first I've something to tell you about myself. We're leaving England next week—me and Bob.'

She enjoyed his surprise. 'Yes, to Blockville, New South Wales, that's far enough off to please you, perhaps.' She related with embellishments some of her recent history. His satisfaction made him unstinting in appreciative comment, and to her own amusement she found herself playing the part of the noble woman, anxious to repair wrongs which she had done in the past to two men whom she loved. She had indeed come with generous intent to tell him that his future would be unburdened by her, and to speak of Miss Chillington; but she delayed allusion to her interview with Elsinora, wishing to keep his attention on herself. At the moment, she desired of all things to appear attractive to Dick. In spite of her real affection for Strong she would not have given

him a thought if she had seen a chance of playing the charmer successfully with Dick.

'Let's sit down here,' she said, 'and rest.'

They were in a half-reaped cornfield, and Connie made herself comfortable among a pile of sheaves. She took off her hat; her hair had grown longer, and little black curls clustered over her neck.

'Sitting in a field together,' she said, lying back luxuriously; 'this is like old times when we were on the tramp and you took care of me. I thought you'd fallen in love with me at the circus and you didn't, but I was in love with you. I cried half the night after you went,—and now,—sit down beside me. Dick, say you care about me still.'

'Of course, I do, Connie.'

'And—I'm your wife and here I am.' She gave him a look to kindle youthful blood, and Dick was not of those men whose souls are as patent safety matchboxes; but the memory of the tramp to Riplow which she had recalled had given him a picture of Elsinora. Connie saw that his thoughts were not for her, and that it was too late to attempt to play the charmer with him. She returned somewhat reluctantly to her former part.

'I've done a deal of mischief in my life,' she said, 'but I suppose I'm going to be respectable now. I shouldn't wonder if you was to hear I'd started teaching in a Sunday school at Blockville.'

Dick laughed.

'But you were always good to me, and I mean to try and make it up to you a bit.

Now I'm coming to something likely to fetch you. I've seen the Irish princess.'

'Miss Chillington!' Dick exclaimed.

'Yes. I've told her everything.'

Dick became another man when she spoke of their meeting.

'You're breaking her heart,' said Connie. 'I know all about her being engaged. Strong told me that first. And you haven't been near her since you came home, have you? I say you're breaking her heart.'

She still lay comfortably resting among the sheaves. Dick walked restlessly to and fro.

'Connie,' he said, 'what on earth do you mean? you're talking riddles or humbugging or something.'

Connie had never found it easy to speak plain truth; she invented with unusual free-

dom now in relating her interview with Miss Chillington.

'If you care about her,' she continued, 'if you think her worth going for, she's to be had. She don't stick at the respectable, but she thinks that's what you're doing. She thinks you're afraid to go to her because you can't ask her to be married in a church, and she's riled, I tell you, and as you don't think it's good enough she's going to stick to the other man and marry him next month, I believe, unless you go in time. And it'll break her heart and spoil her life. But you seem happy enough. You——'

'For God's sake,' interrupted Dick, 'tell me, are you speaking the truth? Did she say that to you?'

'If you impugn my veracity,' said Connie, getting up and assuming an air of dignity,

'I've no more to say. Perhaps you'll show me the way to the station.'

'Don't be ridiculous, Connie. Come along; we'll walk along this path. Go on telling me what was said.'

Connie held up her hand. 'Did you ever see that ring before? that may convince you. She and me were like two sisters; she gave me that off her own finger for a wedding present after I chucked away your wedding-ring. I told her all my own troubles and sins, and that made her confidential to me, and she was upset and said a lot she might have wished to keep close; and from what she said I know as sure's you're standing there you've only got to go to her and say, "Come," and she'll go with you to the other end of the world, and snap her fingers at everybody.'

Dick said nothing; he was much disturbed.

'And you can easy enough find out if you've any doubt,' she continued. 'You're a pretty faint heart to win a fair lady. I say, Dick, I'm getting hungry; what are you going to do with me?'

'Perhaps we'd better go to the inn,' he replied, absently.

'You don't seem very grateful to me, I must say; I thought you'd have said "thank you" anyhow.'

'Oh, I'm really awfully grateful to you, Connie; you're a brick. I always thought you were, really. Come along; we'll go to the inn and have lunch together; it won't be the first time.'

'No,' said Connie, 'I'm not coming. I know it would be awkward for you. You

must get a trap and pick me up and drive me to the station. There's a train some time in the afternoon. I want to part real good friends. And now, before we get out of these quiet fields, just you give me a nice kiss to show you've forgiven me, and it's all right.'

The party at the Priory that evening was a dull one. The Professor was unusually nervous; Clovis Shovel, who was also on a visit, had absented himself all day, and returned in a state of unaccountable depression; Dick was silent, and Humphry was uneasy: there was a mystery about the visits which Connie had paid to Dick which displeased and bewildered him. Everything had been going smoothly until she had appeared, and then Dick had immediately shown signs of his old restlessness. She

appeared on the scenes at inopportune times : she was in some unknown way connected with his fortunes. His comedy was in danger again, and this was the Marplot.

CHAPTER VII

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE AND A LECTURE ON LOVE

NEXT morning Margaret Longfield awoke before sunrise, and ran to the open window with anxious eyes for the promise of the day. It was to be a day of days to her; for yesterday, while she and Dick were together in the churchyard, they had planned an expedition — a long tramp across the moor, to be begun in the early cool of the morning, so as to give time for pleasant mid-day loitering and leisurely home-coming in the evening. As she leaned out of the

window for a view all round, dewdrops were shaken into her hair from the clustering rose branches. She found friendly assurance of what she desired from the sky; a thin mist lay on the moor; in the south, over the valley, a star still hung; and the yew-tree on the hill, which was to be their meeting-place, stood out black against the silver east. Here there was promise of the merry-footed morning, of a day that would run through racing shadows into mellow noon-deeps, and drop from golden noon to crimson sunset, and then pass into the treasury of her heart for ever.

It was long before the hour fixed for meeting, but Margaret was dressed and away before the sun had risen. The wind was stirring in the woods. Up sprang a lark, singing where the star had shone,

catching from his height a first peep of the sunshine, and dropping the golden tidings to her. Then suddenly the woodland flashed green, the streams on the moorside blue; through the mist the distant channel was a bar of gold, and the black yew-tree sombre green against a rosy cloud in the east.

A morning befitting a happy tryst, right setting for the scene pictured by Humphry near the end of his comedy; and indeed if the slumbering author could now have had sight of his heroine, and had known for whom she was bound, his dreams would not have been of marplots and mischances. But of this scene his notes make no record.

With the freshness of the morning in her face, the joy of it in her soul, Margaret walked through the fields. She loved the earth so much that there was no single thing

in it which she could have borne to part with. She asked for nothing more than she knew—no brighter flowers, no kinder hearts. She had no lofty ideals, longed for no stirring scenes of life. Her nature required but to fulfil itself—like the summer day, to pass from the cool and dewy morning into the warmth of calm noon. Such summer days as this ask only for their fulfilment that the west wind of the morning, the first love of the sunshine, shall hold fair into the noon; and she too asked only for the blossoming of her womanhood that the first love of her girlhood should go with her. Her love for Dick had grown with her growth; it had, unknown to her, become part of every change in her life. Often she had feared, often hoped. Now he seemed nearer than at any time since their childhood. He made

her his constant companion, and though his affection had little of the ardour of a lover, might it not be all the surer in the end for this? she asked herself. Love which had made part of itself all simple and sweet gifts of earth, which had won the music of the woodland and the spirit of the wild flowers, and had treasured up the sunshine of forgotten mornings — this and more was for him when he should seek it.

The rosy east grew gold, and the gray west soft with coral clouds. The wind was a child laughing in the woods, racing in the meadows, tossing and playing pranks with the mist-wreaths on the moor. The birds sang the golden reveille. The dewdrops imprisoned the sungold in the very heart of the woodland. And Margaret was a part of the radiance—the morning found utter-

ance in her. For a girl is close to nature. Strip a man of his comforts, rob him of his clothes, and set him in the woods, and behold! he is a savage, no subject for an artist's brush. Do the like for a girl, and we shall see her a nymph, an oread, in harmony with the scene, and a joy for our artist.

Margaret climbed the hill with many a backward glance, for though she was before her time he too might be early. A drove of startled moorland ponies raced in merry circles round her; a hedgehog rolled himself to a ball at her feet; the talk of the Priory rooks in the distance grew louder; blue smoke rose over the village; the ring of an anvil told that the day's work had begun. She reached the yew-tree, and climbed to a hiding-place among its branches, a favourite

perch of her childhood, and waited for Dick. Her thoughts turned to the mysterious girl who had come to see him on the previous day. She wondered whether he would tell her about this girl, who must be connected in some way with his past life, perhaps with its unhappy side, with days to be regretted. But she was untroubled; Dick might have been foolish, but she trusted him; if only he loved her she asked no explanation. Jealousy she had felt, but not now. The only sting of it which had troubled her sweet nature had come of his visits to Ireland and the mention she had heard of Miss Chillington; but now he never spoke of Ireland, and she had almost forgotten what she had suffered from past apprehension. And this day was to be her own. As she waited she pictured it throughout—first, merry meeting;

then brisk tramping in the cool morning to the village at the edge of the moor where they were to breakfast; then there was so much to talk of on their wayfaring, such promise of pleasant pictures for them as they went, such comradeship, such laughter in store. And she would be near him—nearer than ever to-day, her heart told her; for the fancy was with her, though she dared not admit it to herself, that before the end of this expedition he would claim the love she was so ready to give.

The sun rose higher; the sky was a deeper blue, and the clouds, held high on the west wind, were now all white. The time for their meeting had passed, and Dick had not come. 'Lazy boy,' she laughed to herself, 'you never could get up in the morning; but when you come I shall be

hidden here, and make you wait a while before I come down.' But the minutes passed to the half-hour, and a shade of vexation crossed her face as she left her hiding-place and walked slowly back in the direction of the Priory.

Some one was coming to meet her, but it was not Dick; for Dick had forgotten his engagement and was now driving to Wayland to catch the first train of the day which should take him on his way to Ireland.

Clovis Shovel had spent a restless night, and had formed a valiant resolution. As long as he had thought that Dick might have been Margaret's lover he had bravely put her out of his thoughts; but some words which he had spoken about her a few days previously had assured him that she was no more to him than a dear friend. During the

last week he had been consumed with jealousy, and of no other person than innocent, unconscious Professor Wintersea. The Professor and Margaret had indeed become excellent friends; her friendliness had captivated him, and he had found himself at ease with her. Clovis had watched them together with tortures, and a jesting remark which Tom Longfield had made to him a couple of days before had confirmed his suspicions and fired him to action. 'Humphry's been recommending the Professor to get married,' said he, 'and I believe he's hit. Look at him and Margaret! I never saw the old bird so jolly. I believe he's going to cut all you young fellows out.' Probably nothing else in the world could have made Clovis venture to approach her himself as a suitor; his modesty would have

prevented such a possibility; but when he compared himself with the Professor he appeared at least equally eligible. He could have done grievous bodily injury to that peaceful man: for the first time in his life he knew the emotion of hatred; and courage came of it. From his window this morning he had seen Margaret crossing the fields. He determined to steal a march on his rival and, come what might, try his chances before she had sacrificed herself. So it happened that she met Clovis instead of Dick.

Her first view of an approaching figure in the distance made her heart leap; but when she saw to whom it belonged, her disappointment grew for a minute to irritation. Clovis approached awkwardly.

'Good morning, Miss Longfield,' he said; 'what a glorious morning!'

'Yes,' she answered, trying to be friendly. 'So you are an early riser too?'

'Not as a rule, Miss Longfield. I fear I am usually a heavy sleeper in the morning, but I intend to break myself of the habit, really.' The rings of sleeplessness encircled his eyes; his cheeks were sallow; he looked as much out of place in the setting of early light as Margaret looked in harmony with it.

'Do you wish to be alone, or may I walk back with you?' he asked, nervously.

'Oh! I shall be delighted,' replied Margaret; but 'How shall I get rid of this little bore?' was what she thought.

'Do you sketch at all, Miss Longfield?' he asked.

'Oh dear, no! I should only spoil paper and get into a temper at my own stupidity.'

'I am sure you wouldn't. I mean you

wouldn't be stupid about it, and I know you are fond of art.'

She gave him a glance. She had hardly looked at him before. She was wondering how Dick could ever have chosen this man to be his friend; but as he was Dick's friend he must be hers.

'Yes,' she said, thinking of art in connection with Dick, not him, 'it is a splendid profession—next best to the army.'

'I am so glad to hear you say that,' cried Clovis, flattered. 'It is indeed a glorious service. Mere scholarship seems so barren in comparison,—mathematics, for instance.'

'Yes, mathematics are dreadful. I never could learn as much as a proposition in Euclid.'

'Of course not,' said Clovis, with relief and delight; 'it would be a terrible thing

to live with a mathematician, one who would try to reduce housekeeping to a formula.'

'And yet I have known mathematicians, charming men, who could appreciate beautiful things.'

'Not truly, Miss Longfield. Indeed they cannot.' He was apprehensive again. 'No mathematician could be ever inspired by a woman, like an artist. I—I—I did not tell you that I am about to be elected as an associate of the Academy.'

'I am so glad to hear of your success, Mr. Shovel. I suppose Dick was delighted with your good news?'

'Dick? Yes. I haven't told him yet. You are the first I have told,—I looked forward to telling you first.'

Margaret could hardly help smiling. Was

it possible that this could be another lover? she thought.

'I wished to tell you——' he stammered, and stopped. 'I wonder when Dick will be back?'

'Where from?' she asked quickly.

'Oh, I don't know,' said Clovis. 'I saw him as I came out; he was just setting off for the station in the dog-cart. Dear Miss Longfield——'

'To the station, did you say?'

'Yes. He said he had important business, and hardly knew when he should return.'

Margaret's face flushed. 'You are quite sure?' she asked.

'Oh yes, perfectly. I saw him, you know. Dear Miss Longfield——' But Margaret had turned her back on him and was walking towards the ponies, who had paused in their

scampering, and were now close by eyeing them inquisitively. She held out her hand in friendly fashion and approached, followed by Clovis. One of the ponies stood and let her come up to him, and suffered her to throw an arm over his neck and stroke his head.

'Miss Longfield,' Clovis pleaded, while she still kept her back turned to him, 'I am —I can't tell you what I feel. I feel my utter unworthiness; but no one could love and worship you more, and—dear Miss Longfield——' He continued to stutter and gasp out his declaration.

Margaret could stand it no longer. This was the end of her expedition, her day of days; the anticlimax made her inclined to laugh hysterically. She did not make the slightest response; it was as though she had not heard.

'See,' she said suddenly, with an unwonted flash of anger in her eyes, 'see how well I can ride bareback!' And without looking at Clovis again, she took hold of a knot of the pony's shaggy mane and sprang on his back. In an instant the pony was away across the level stretch of ground, galloping for the rest of the drove. For a few hundred yards Margaret kept her precarious seat cleverly, then seeing some uneven ground ahead, slipped off, and took a path to the left which led through the woods towards home.

Clovis stood in speechless dismay. Then he blinked, heaved a profound sigh, and struggled with a choking at the throat. 'She couldn't have heard what I said, or couldn't have taken it in,' he thought; 'it was impossible that she could have heard; and perhaps it is as well—yes, it is perhaps as well.'

After standing motionless until she was out of sight he walked slowly towards the Priory, pondering in his heart. If Margaret had loved the Professor, he reasoned, she could not have spoken with disrespect of Euclid; and now that his jealousy was gone, he appeared to himself as a ridiculous suitor. He was ashamed; he marvelled to think of his presumption, and clung to the hope that his declaration had been misunderstood. He remembered bitterly the fashion of his countenance and the timidity of his heart, and he knew that he was an impossible lover for such a girl. What did it help him that he could understand and love the beautiful if his features were grotesque; what that he had wells of love to give if no one had need of them, or drew but a casual pitcherful now and then? But it consoled him to remember

that his love for Margaret was his own, beyond reach of robber; his life should be true to her; she would inspire his art. So it was well with him. The energy of love, which for him might not express, expand, diffuse, and recreate itself in loving, would, without doubt, take other forms of activity and lift his work heavenward; and therein he would find happiness.

Humphry was walking on a sunny path in front of the Priory, waiting for the sound of the breakfast bell, when Clovis appeared. Humphry was not in his most agreeable mood. Dick's departure, which he connected with Connie's visit, had annoyed him, and reawakened some apprehension for the success of his comedy; but it would have been difficult to detect any outward tokens of his displeasure; it never found expression in

ordinary channels. He now met Clovis with a smile.

'You have been walking early, Mr. Shovel. You look extremely well this morning. I hope you have enjoyed yourself.'

'Oh yes, extremely,' answered Clovis, nervously. 'It is indeed a beautiful morning; the birds have been singing very sweetly.'

'Very. You sing yourself, do you not, Mr. Shovel? We have enjoyed your playing, but you have not yet sung to us.'

'No indeed,' said Clovis, earnestly, 'I do not sing at all. My poor father, it is true, used to sing—he was a very successful singer of comic songs. But I have none of his talent.'

'It has found expression in another form, sir.' Humphry chuckled inwardly; this in-

formation had suddenly given him the secret of the humour of the son's countenance. 'By the way, do you happen to know where Dick has gone?'

'No indeed,' replied Clovis.

'Mr. Shovel!' said Humphry, solemnly, 'you are a young man with talent, and therefore likely to be attractive to the other sex. Let me as a friend give you a word of warning: do not suffer yourself to be entangled with women.' Clovis blushed crimson; he fancied Humphry must have some suspicion of his love for Margaret.

'Indeed, I have no hope—no intention,' he stammered.

'They lay snares for you, sir, when you least suspect them.' Clovis felt that he was being lectured, but Humphry was thinking of

Dick, and seeking solace in expressing his views.

'And be very careful, Mr. Shovel, about falling in love. Above all, do not idealise women. The ideal of woman is the blossom of the tree, the realisation is its fruit. The lovely wild apple-blossom turns to a fruit which sets the teeth on edge; the fruit of the may-flower is a husk. Let your expectation be humble, and you will be pleasantly rewarded. Nature again gives us an illustration. Your trivial vine-blossom turns to the cluster which yields you wine; the poor flower of the vegetable-marrow is converted to a noble companion for the autumnal joint. The only part we can play properly in life is comedy. The vegetable-marrow is a comedian; it has no desire to be heroic; there is no striving for romance in its flower, but look

at the fruit! and think of the dignity it achieves in the third act. Your crab-tree, on the other hand, is a worthless actor which essays the romantic and ends in anticlimax.'

'But some women, sir,' said Clovis more boldly, and thinking of Margaret, 'excel any ideal we can form—they are angels.'

'Angels! yes, one in a thousand; and then you have to wrestle with her like Jacob, and the chances are that you will be thrown.'

'Indeed, I have no intention of marrying, sir,' said Clovis.

'You are wise; for if you idealise the wrong woman, you have disappointment, and if the right one, disappointment also, for she will probably be out of reach.'

Clovis sighed. 'He need not marry, but the ideal is his own,' he said.

'Certainly, let him keep his ideal if he

likes. The blossom belongs to him who loves it best; the fruit is his who happens to own the garden.' Talking had relieved Humphry, and the sound of the breakfast-bell almost restored his equanimity.

'I have been much interested in your views,' he said. 'Come, let us go to breakfast. I have just received some very choice Norwegian anchovies in juniper, and I have instructed Mrs. Collop in the serving of lax, which is to accompany them, and which I think you will find to your taste. A rasher of Westphalian bacon will follow.'

Professor Wintersea joined them as they entered. 'Mr. Shovel has just been giving me his views about women and love, Professor,' said Humphry. 'I am reminded by them of an opinion I once heard expressed by a peasant lad in Wales—the sharpest boy

I ever met; he was about fourteen years of age, but a philosopher. Amongst other things he said that it was not his intention to marry. "Not marry?" we asked him, "pray why?" "No," he replied, "women are painful things."'

'A very just remark,' said the Professor.

CHAPTER VIII

OBSERVATIONS AT THE CROSS-ROADS

Dick had chosen to live and resign Elsinora rather than sacrifice his life in making an effort to save her. His passion had slept, needing but a touch to arouse it, and Connie's words had brought the awakening. But it had not been to die that he had come to Ireland, — not to fulfil his obligation to O'Connor, but to defy it: to rescue Elsinora, not by honourable death, but by dishonourable evasion. It was one of those crises in passion when the man, though a strong man, accepts the woman's view of the situa-

tion. From Connie's words Dick believed that Elsinora was ready to break through all barriers and promises; he could fancy her saying—

> 'I could not love thee, dear, so well,
> Loved I not honour——'

not '*more*' but '*less*'; she would come to him in spite of everything; and this being so, neither considerations of duty nor thought of consequences, nor fear of God or man should check him. But he did not know Elsinora's view of the situation, nor had he read to the depths of her nature when he formed this conclusion; his honour was in her keeping.

It was an exciting enterprise with a doubtful issue. He knew that, failing to fulfil his bond to O'Connor, he ran the risk of being shot by orders of the secret society; and the reflection that he came to Bally-

vonaire openly, and thus stood in danger of death still, was the only offering he could make to his conscience.

He had sent a telegram to say that he was coming. The dilapidated Angel of the Post-Office of Kenmare, mounted on horseback, who presented it to Elsinora, had shone in her sight as a messenger from heaven. She was too excited to await Dick's coming, and walked to meet him along the road by which he would have to drive. But he, too, was walking, and, having made a short cut by a mountain path, it happened that they missed each other. When he passed the settlement at the cross-roads, near Ballyvonaire, he became an object of interest to the knot of idlers at the forge and the women leaning over the half doors of cabins.

'Ah, ho,' said one, ''tis the Englishman; I remimber his faytures.'

''Tis the same,' said another.

'Mrs. Kaylagher!'

'Yes, Paddy Blake.'

'Did ye hear any fresh news o' the O'Connor and herself?'

''Deed then, no.'

'Whisper! Didn't she be after walking to the top o' Glen Connor to meet the Englishman?'

'Why then, indeed, for what else, Paddy?'

'And what's the maning of it, I ax you, Mrs. Kaylagher, if it isn't that there's something betune her and him?'

'Oh, but 'tis you have the divil's own head for raysoning things.'

'And behind the O'Connor's back!'

'Ah, Pat, shure she's very free,' said Mrs. Kaylagher; 'she have the good word for every one, God bless her, and she may have a friend here and a friend there, and small blame to her honour. But 'tisn't for the likes of us to be sayin' a word agin her; and laste of all, 'tisn't for you to say it,' she continued, warming, 'for who but yourself gave your shouldher to Ma'nan Begley, a dacent girrl, when her father was turned out of his bit of land, and went coortin' the housemaid at the great house. You're a disgrace and a schamer, and you're nothin' else.'

Pat sought more sympathetic company amongst the men outside the forge. He was so pleased with his theory that the O'Connor had a rival that he propounded it here again. Two men who had just arrived exchanged glances: they were members of O'Connor's

society, and had been present on the night of the duel.

These two men shortly afterwards departed in different ways; one of them in the direction of O'Connor's house, the other along the road by which Elsinora had been seen to walk; and the latter took especial pains to escape observation.

At the end of the pass of Glen Connor Elsinora was resting. She had pictured this as the spot where she would meet Dick. Presently she would see him in the distance; and then! To-day, she pleaded with herself, she need not remember the barriers between them; to-day she might be weak, since to-morrow she must be strong; to-day for meeting and the joy of it, to-morrow for parting and its pain. She found some relief from restless thoughts in talking to her little

Scotch terrier, who was also taking a rest on the rock at her side.

'Oh, Larry,' she said, 'my pretty little Larry, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But my affection hath no soundings, like the Bay of Portugal. That is in Shakespeare, Larry, or something like it.'

Larry allowed his tail to flap the rock thrice; he was too polite to show less attention, too indifferent to show more.

'And, Larry, there is some one coming to meet us soon, and I wonder if we look warm; and your mistress was very wrong to put on her prettiest frock; she ought to have found an ugly one; she ought not to try and make herself look well, because then, you see, he'll be fonder of her, and she ought to want him to care less for her, and then he

could go away without minding so much. But she wants him to admire her and love her more and more, and yet she's going to send him away, Larry; and she is very foolish and vain, and she wishes she were dead.' And Larry's tail wagged only once; he was getting bored.

A sound attracted her attention. She looked up, and saw a man stealthily appearing through the rocks.

'Oh!' said Elsinora, 'is that you, Tom Shehan? I thought you were cutting your oats. What brings you all the way up here?'

The man looked round to make sure there was no one in sight, and approached nearer.

'Phaix, then, your honour, I was just wondthering that same meself whin I came

round the corner,' he said in a low voice. 'Whin I set out I knew right well what it was, and now 'tis gone. "Maybe," says I to meself, "'tis the little donkey that's sthrayed on me, and maybe 'tis the lint of the loan of a scythe I do be wantin' from Mr. Henessy, and maybe 'tis to meet some one I've come," says I.'

Elsinora laughed.

'Maybe your honour came with the same intent,' he added, mysteriously.

She looked up quickly.

'You were always the good friend to me and mine, Miss,' said the man.

'Is there anything wrong, anything I can do for you?' she asked, anxiously.

'Whisht!' he held up his hand and listened.

''Tis as much as me life's worth to be

seen spakin' to your honour to-day,' he explained. She was beginning to feel alarmed.

'The Englishman's gone down before you,' he whispered, 'and he'll be a dead man in forty-eight hours.'

Elsinora started. 'Shehan,' she cried, 'tell me—what do you mean? Can you mean that they will—try to murder him?'

'Not murther, thin, at all, but honest work, and 'twill be no more than his rights.'

There was a gleam of hostility in his eyes. But for Elsinora he would have been well pleased that O'Connor's enemy should meet the death which he had earned; but the look of trouble and appeal in the face of the lady he loved touched him.

'Right or wrong, I'd help him if 'twas in me power,' he said, 'but it's beyond me, and

there's no more to say, good or bad. I'm sworn. But ax him yourself. Ax him if he remimbers the last day he was here—that's a twelvemonth this day week. Send him away out of Ireland before Tuesday night, or he'll be a dead man. And good luck to you, Miss, for, faith, you were always the good lady to me and mine.' Before she could find words he was out of sight among the rocks. Her courage did not desert her, though she was pale, and her hand trembled. She stood for a moment irresolute; then she struck into the mountain path, and went homeward at a pace which astonished the thoughtful Larry.

After a year of separation the lovers had to endure the discomfort of meeting in the presence of others. Elsinora found Dick with Father Daly and her sister Caroline on

the lawn. They did their parts creditably, hardly venturing to look at each other. Even when Caroline had taken Father Daly to the other end of the garden, and they were alone for a while, one touch of Elsinora's hand was his only welcome; they knew that their hour of greeting had not come, and longed for the darkness. But in that brief space Elsinora told him of his danger, and implored him to leave at once; and her questioning won from him the story of the duel. She was trying to grasp the meaning of that tragic absurdity when Caroline and Father Daly returned. Caroline had a ready explanation for her sister's agitation, and looked with a kindly, critical eye at Dick. She noticed some change in him; his face was bronzed, and he had the air of a man who has seen service. 'He

ought to have been a soldier,' she thought; 'he is not a bit like a sculptor;' but she approved him, and was quite ready to accept him as a brother-in-law. Father Daly said good-bye to him with expressions of great cordiality. 'Come and dine with me, sir,' he said; 'come on Tuesday; there's mate'—this with a sly twinkle; for, as Caroline afterwards explained, his reverence kept an excellent table.

CHAPTER IX

THE PINE WOODS

Dick and Elsinora went out into the windy night. The air was full of lonely sound,—of the rising sea, and of the pine-trees, and of distant mountain waters. She slipped her hand into his, and let her cheek touch his shoulder for a moment. The dark pine woods were round them; their hour of greeting had come.

He drew her close to him; her arms were round his neck; her kiss wedded his. Tears rushed to her eyes; great joy and great sorrow overpowered her. For love of her

she believed he had come to meet death; he had shown that he loved her better than he loved life; heaven touched her earth; never was love like his.

But Dick had no thought of ideal love; his heart beat madly; her nearness thrilled him. Life, which a week ago had seemed good for its own sake, was now, without her, worthless. He must possess her utterly. She, this one girl of girls, must be his—his wife. For this he could die; but to win the boon without paying the penalty was his aim.

'I am afraid, Dick,' she said; 'let us go in; you may be watched.'

'Dearest, don't fear anything,' he tried to reassure her; 'I am safe enough to-night at least. There is a week left.'

'I will go to Mr. O'Connor; he will be

generous; and you must leave early in the morning.'

'No, no,' he said; 'you must not go to him. And you must forget that wretched farce of a duel. Let us forget everything except each other now.'

Farce or not, it was evident to Dick that she regarded the issues as tragic, and that it had not occurred to her that there could be any evasion of his obligation. Her view of the situation insensibly affected his, but at present he could make no outlook; he could think of nothing but her.

She led him down through the pine wood by a path which only one who knew it well could have found in the darkness. Dick spread his overcoat for her on the dry fir spines which covered the mossy grass, and sat at her side. The only light came to

them from below through the tree-trunks,—a reflection of starry sky in the waters of a little mere, through which the river ran. The sound of the sea was lost; nothing but the sounds of the woods could be heard: the yearning of the wind's voice in the pines, the softer whisper of the larches, the silver hush of the birch-trees, the sudden rustle of the reeds in the water. The voices of the woods touched the same chord in both hearts; they spoke, where words were powerless, of infinite yearning, of divine regret, of unfulfilled love.

'Sweetheart,' he said, 'I have been picturing you to myself for nearly a year, every day and every night, and now this is *you*. I tried to get killed because I loved you so much, and once or twice I nearly was killed; and then, when I thought I should

never see you again, I used to feel your hand in mine, as it is now. And then afterwards for a little while I fancied I could live without you. But I had to come, and I cannot leave you any more.'

'So you love me well enough to die for me,' she said, 'my own brave boy; what other girl had ever such a lover!' She drew closer to him, and wound her arm in his. 'But you must not die. If you go away there will be no dishonour in living. I will see him. But we must never see each other again, never, till we die.'

'I will not have life without you,' said Dick, excitedly. 'I cannot even endure to think of what it would be, month after month, year after year, alone, without one touch of the dear hand. And you—you, my own girl, you could not bear it either if you love me as I think you do.'

They were silent for awhile. Elsinora was trying to look bravely along that dark vista of lonely road which his words had opened. The wind in the pines again had voices for both of them, of the infinite pathos and grand regrets of life.

Some natures find truest expression in hours of calm, and are untrue to themselves under emotion; others hardly reveal themselves in the peace of daily life, but awake in the atmosphere of storm. Of these were both Dick and Elsinora. It was now that the innermost soul of each was expressed, and the woman was nobler than the man.

'Elsinora,' said he, 'if there had been no barrier between us but Connie—that marriage which was no marriage,—would you have come to me? Could you, though the world

would not have called you my wife,—could you have faced it?'

'Yes,' she answered, firmly. 'I should have been proud to come to you. Could you doubt it? Could you doubt that I love you better than the opinion of the world?'

'And cannot you face the world and come with me now?' he cried, impulsively. 'Elsinora, for God's sake, don't let us be beaten by an idea. This is real; this life is a thing we know. I love *you*, the girl I see now. I love you, whom I can feel close to my heart. We know nothing of any future life—it may be or not,—but we have this. Are you going through the rest of your life without love, without me? Let me break my word! Let me be dishonourable! What are all these words, these words of man's

making, compared with life and love? To throw away life and love is a greater wrong. We are sinning against nature, we are sacrificing a real thing for a shadow. Come with me, Elsinora; come and forget it all. Dearest, you will come!'

She clasped his hand closer, but did not answer.

'You are coming,' he whispered.

Elsinora shook her head.

'Oh, you will—you must.'

'No, Dick, I cannot,' she said.

'You can't! you don't love me enough to face it!'

She threw herself into his arms, and cried bitterly.

'Oh, Dick! unkind, unkind, not love you enough? You did not mean it. But even to say it!'

He felt himself lowered in her sight—her hero no longer. He saw clearly enough the difference which she saw between scorn for conventional opinion and violation of a pledge of honour.

'It would not be facing the world bravely,' she said; 'it would be hiding away. Every promise broken, every obligation. We should be ashamed; our love would be no longer what it is.'

'I was wrong to ask you,' said Dick. 'My love for you and these intolerable fetters make me mad. Forget that I said it.' His sole thought now was of standing uninjured in her estimation; her love was everything to him.

'But I shall not leave you, dear,' he said. 'I shall go through with it.'

Her breath came quickly. 'Dick!——'

She stopped, hearing her name. It was her sister's voice. 'Elsinora!'—clear and sweet and distant it came to them, and an echo of it from hills beyond the pine woods, 'Elsinora!'

CHAPTER X

ELSINORA AND O'CONNOR

On the afternoon of the following day Elsinora was on her way to O'Connor's house. In the failing light he was sitting alone in his room; he looked worn and ill, and was evidently restless and excited. He would start suddenly, and listen as though he heard footsteps or voices in the lonely house; and from time to time he rose and went to the window. It was a dreary outlook: the fir plantation black under darkening skies; the reedy lough, where the wild-duck were settling for the night, reflecting a gleam

of melancholy gray, and beyond the brown moorland and the lonely mountains. Within the room it was still drearier: pale lamplight fell on the bare walls; there was no sound in the house but O'Connor's tread as he walked to and fro.

He had never recovered from the effects of his accident, and the failure of his work and his loss of Elsinora had injured his mental as well as his bodily health. The news of Malory's arrival had changed his condition of despondency to one of extreme excitement. This was the enemy who had ruined his hopes, who had forfeited his life to him, and who now had come to Ireland on the eve of the expiration of the term allowed, either to carry out his obligation or to shirk it, he could not tell which. The sole remaining satisfaction which life

had to offer him was revenge; and if his enemy intended to be dishonourable, if he came as Miss Chillington's lover and did not mean to pay the penalty, it was good to remember that certain death awaited him. His movements were being watched, and every minute O'Connor expected one of his followers to come to him with news. After a while his excitement abated, and his despondent mood returned. He took some old letters from a drawer, and commenced reading them by the lamplight. Once he pressed his hand against his forehead, as though trying to remember something, and there was a look of fear in his eyes. Then he looked up, and again listened as for footsteps. This time he was not mistaken; Elsinora herself was at the door.

Dick had expressed his intention of re-

maining with her, of facing all the consequences and meeting death,—how or where he did not concern himself. He had spoken impetuously, without consideration, eager only to reinstate himself in her good opinion. But though she rejoiced in her heart at his decision, she determined that his life must be saved, and that she would see O'Connor. Nothing but overpowering love could have sent her on such a mission : to ask from the man to whom she had broken a double promise, who had generously freed her, a boon for the man whom he knew to be his rival. She was nervous, she felt humiliated ; and it was only the remembrance that she came against Dick's wish, and that he had sworn to go through with his part honourably, that helped to sustain her pride. Her face did not reveal her agitation ; her climb up the hill had

brought the colour to her cheeks, and the girl who stood before O'Connor was not pale, but radiant. He rose and gave her a chair with a trembling hand.

'I am afraid—I hope you are not ill,' she said to him, noting with trouble his changed appearance.

'I am far from well,' he answered. 'I suppose I never quite got over that accident.'

She hardly knew what to say. She recognised her own handwriting in the letter on the table at his side. She felt her task to be supremely difficult.

'I am going away, Miss Chillington,' he said, 'going to leave the old place altogether. I have worked hard, God knows, for the cause of our country, and it has all come to nothing. I am broken. My life is over.'

She had no word of hope to offer him

about the cause which they had once been mutually zealous to support, and of which she had lately thought so little ; and she felt that it was less the failure of his work than his loss of her which had overwhelmed him.

'How I worked for it!' he continued, almost as if speaking to himself, 'and this is the end.'

'Life is full of disappointment and sorrow, Mr. O'Connor,' she said, with an effort, 'but no brave, good work is lost, though we may not see the result of it ourselves. I, too, am very unhappy, and I, too, am going to leave Ireland for a long, long time.'

He grew suddenly alert, and looked up with quick jealousy. 'With whom?' he asked.

'With my father. I am going to Canada.'

O'Connor remained silent.

'I did you a great wrong, Mr. O'Connor,'

said Elsinora, timidly, 'and you were generous—more than generous. I want before we part—I want you to be generous to me once more,—to my friend, Mr. Malory.'

O'Connor sprang to his feet.

'Has he told you, then?' he asked, excitedly—'told you all that took place between him and me?'

'Yes, I asked him questions. I found it out.'

'I always thought he was a treacherous rascal, like all the rest of his countrymen,' cried O'Connor. 'By God, he does not deserve to live,—the man who has ruined me, who has stolen your love from me, whose life I spared on condition he kept out of the country and away from you. I trusted him, though, as a gentleman, and this is the result. And he has not even the manliness to

come to me himself to beg for his life—he sends a woman to do it for him. Miss Chillington, can you have any respect for such a man?'

'He does not know I have come, and he does not wish to neglect his bond,' said Elsinora, proudly.

'He means to go through with it?'

'This is why I have come — because I believed you yourself would not wish it, that you would be generous. He will keep your conditions still. I will send him away at once—to-night.'

'If you think his life worth preserving he can keep it. Let him live and enjoy himself,' said O'Connor, scornfully. Then his tone changed. 'I am glad you came; I am glad to be able to show you that my love for you is true.'

Her cheeks flushed, and tears filled her eyes.

'What were we saying?' cried O'Connor, suddenly, with a look of fear in his eyes; 'to-night, the seventh of September. Oh, I remember. My head gets a little queer sometimes. I suppose you want to marry him; he wants my blessing. What was it we were saying? You are going to send him away to-night. Yes, his life is his own. But — you will not marry him?'

'If you think my promise worth anything, Mr. O'Connor,' she said, with emotion, 'I promise you that I will never see him again after this evening, unless—unless he refuses to accept your generosity. I cannot say; he does not know I have come.'

'Oh,' replied O'Connor, 'I don't think he is very likely to refuse. And you say you

will send him away at once. I believe you. It is you who are generous now. You are sparing me the torture of fancying him with you as your lover. God knows how I love you, and this from you is something to remember, better than revenge.'

Elsinora could say no more; she gave him her hand and went.

O'Connor walked up and down the room in agitation; then he sat down again and listened to the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece. A curious gleam was in his eyes; a delusion which had once or twice lately taken possession of him recurred now.

'Ah,' he thought, 'it is better to have won her love and to have to die for it than to have lived and lost her.'

He looked at the clock with excitement. 'Six o'clock,' he said aloud; 'six hours? no,

six days and six hours left; and I could be free to live if I chose to ask pardon and promise the Englishman I would give her up. But I'm damned if I will. I'll die like a man. Six days—no, six days and six hours left.' A few moments afterwards he rose, trembling violently. 'What the devil's the matter with me?' he cried. 'Good God, I thought for the moment that it was I who had lost and had to die. Where's Ring?'

CHAPTER XI

THE PROGRESS OF HUMPHRY'S COMEDY

ONCE more the question was put to Dick, whether his love of life or his love of Elsinora were greater? A year ago when it had arisen he had proved his faith to her in action,—he had sought death and failed to find it. Afterwards, with the glow of new-born life about him and the girl who inspired his passion remote, the other answer had been given, as Humphry had predicted. The love of life comes with the steady pulse, when the passions are up it is forgotten; and expediency was as powerless to stay Dick

now as would be the words of philosophy to check a charge of cavalry in mid career. None the more on that account does the soldier desire death; and though Elsinora was dearer to Dick than life, life was dear. All the forces of his nature were concentrated in a passion to possess her. Resign her he would not, no matter what the cost; but to possess her and life also was his aim. And what of broken promises and honourable obligations? He put the disturbing question aside. Love, he argued, justified everything; it was great enough to make its own laws; the happiness of his life and hers should not be sacrificed for the sake of observing fine points of honour. He allowed himself the excuse that he was a sinful man, not a hero of romance, and he would win his girl and live his life too, if it were possible.

And herein was marked the difference between Dick's love and Elsinora's. He could dissociate it from honour, she could not. Her love was fast bound with all that she held noble and truest in life : a wound to truth was a wound to love.

The picture of O'Connor, broken in health and heart, haunted her on her way home. She saw herself as the cause of his ruin. The memory of her own unfaith, of Dick's readiness to break his word of honour, his endeavour to induce her to go with him, troubled her. Her nature was loyal and true : she was weary of broken trust. There must, she determined, be no more weakness or failure, else love itself would fail. She resolved that Dick should go at once. Even the sweetness of one more evening together must be sacrificed. She would be firm, even

though he thought her cold. She believed that he would not fail, that he would understand and trust her, that their love would endure in spite of life-long separation, and that in the end it would be well.

She heard on her return that he was in the library and went at once to him. Some beautiful golden-brown locks were disarranged about her brow. He touched them lovingly. The task of sending him away was terribly hard, the joy of the thought of what life would have been for them if they had been free filled her.

'Dick,' she said, 'I have seen Mr. O'Connor; he was generous; he does not wish you to die. You are quite free, but you must go at once. I have promised.'

'I don't want his generosity,' said Dick, angrily, 'unless—unless he made it complete,'

he added, in a different tone; 'unless you come with me.'

She looked pained; he noticed a tone of coldness in her voice.

'Dick, you do not know what you are saying. I am weary of all this unfaithfulness. He has been honourable and generous. There is only one way left for us. You must go at once—this evening.'

'You can bear to live without me?'

'I must, I must, Dick.'

'You can let me go through a miserable lonely life for the sake of keeping faith to a wretched artificial bond. Even if it were a sin to break it, do you not love me enough to be sinful for my sake?'

'No,' she said firmly, 'I love you too much to let you be dishonourable. If I went with you I should despise myself, and

I should not love you as I do now. Oh, my dearest, don't think I am saying hard things, —my heart is breaking for love of you,—but you must be true. We shall love each other for ever. Our love will endure through all absence. I shall be yours as truly as if I were at your side.'

Elsinora's nature had always asked for, and responded to, the heroic. She had dreamed of a heroic lover, and Dick had been such in her eyes. His reckless daring in the Soudan, his readiness to sacrifice his life in coming to Ireland in the hope of freeing her from O'Connor, had won the fullest measure of her admiration, and with it the deepest depth of her love. So entirely was her heart given to him that no failure on his part could have uprooted her love; but it could wound it, chill it. To her hero she was a lover,

passionate, ready to give herself utterly; to the man who failed she was a woman, loving and sorrowing, whose fires were unkindled. Dick had seen this on the previous night; he saw it again now. His passion for her overcame every other consideration; her honour, her steadfastness only increased it; her warmest love must be his, and, as he could not obtain it otherwise, he would not hesitate to give his life.

A hungry man has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; a lover his life for a kiss. Often in such cases reflection might have caused regret for the bargain; perhaps in some there is an intention of, if possible, taking the boon and avoiding the payment. Now, life seemed of no value to Dick, and the thought of death had no sting. The end was victory, not defeat. He would go to

meet death through the very gates of love. Perhaps when the hour of payment came he, too, would hesitate; who should say? But now he was her lover. His eyes kindled with a resolve; he drew her closer and whispered to her.

'You are right,' he said. 'Your truth and honour make me a man, but I cannot leave you. Last night you said that my farce of a marriage would have been no barrier, and if it had not been for my bond to O'Connor you would have come to me in spite of it.'

'Oh yes,' she answered.

'Then you must come, dear, now, and I will be true to my bond.'

She drew a quick breath.

'There is a week—six days—left before the year is up. You must come with me, you must be my own girl utterly. Life is nothing

to me without you—you are everything to me. When the time comes I can die all right. But you must be my wife.'

Her face flushed crimson; she did not speak, but hid her face on his shoulder.

'Dearest, you cannot refuse me. I claim you. If you do not come, I swear I will go through with it all the same. I have been born on this earth to win you for my wife, and I will. Look at me, darling—answer me.'

'Oh, Dick, I am bewildered, I am afraid.'

'We will go to-night, dearest. We will take the cutter and sail away to-night. And I will bring you back, I promise you, before the time. But till then, sweetheart, I will keep you. There shall be no failure; I shall not flinch in the end.'

She was carried away by his fervour; her

eyes were bright with excitement, her hand trembled in his. She was frightened, but she was lifted heavenward. Hers was the brave vision which can distinguish between true honour and the world's conventional view of it. She had refused to allow Dick to disgrace himself by cowardly evasion of his obligation. To take her and not pay the debt was dishonourable; to go with him, though she might not be called his wife, was no dishonour. The mischance of his marriage with Connie placed no barrier of conscience, no law of God, between them. The only interposing barrier was the law of society, more fearful than the law of God to the respectably timid,—to her nothing. Connie had gone through the form of marriage with him—but that had not made her his wife; she herself could not go

through the form, but she would be none the less his true wife for the want of it. And if he fulfilled his bond and paid the penalty of death all would be atoned, all unfaith cancelled. But still she sought to deter him.

'Oh, I would come,' she said,—'you know I would come—but I cannot let you die. If you go to-night without me, you may live and still be honourable.'

'If you come with me, I can die and be honourable.'

'I cannot let you die. My dear, dear boy, don't force me.'

'If you do not come,' he exclaimed, 'I swear to God I will not live without you.'

He had made up his mind to possess her, and she saw it was useless to try further to dissuade him, and she was glad. She

flung her arms round his neck and kissed him.

'I am yours,' she said; 'I will come with you.'

Half an hour later she was speeding across the fields towards Father Daly's house. It showed her as pure woman, not free from lovable weakness, that while she was ready to brave the world and cared not for its view of her reputation, she desired at this time the blessing of her priest.

Father Daly had gone across from his house to the chapel, and thither she followed him. He was in the vestry, and hailed her with delight, but he saw in a moment that she was disturbed and excited.

'Dear Father Daly,' she said, 'I am going to be married. I am going away to-night. I want your blessing before I go.'

'And who's the lucky man, my dear child?' he asked in astonishment.

'Mr. Malory,' she answered. 'I cannot tell you any more now. I will tell you everything, everything when we — when I come back. Oh, dear Father Daly, but if only we could have been married by you; but as we cannot, I want your blessing before I go.'

He knew that Malory was a Protestant, and supposed that to please him she intended to go through the Church of England marriage ceremony, and was troubled at the prospect. He, too, was distressed, but he made no protest. He knew her resolute nature; he loved her dearly; her word was a law to him.

She took the old man's hand and led him from the vestry into the chapel. The candles

were lighted on the altar, and Elsinora knelt down on the altar step.

'Here,' she whispered,—'I want you to bless me here, and say the same blessing that you would say if you were marrying me.'

Soft light from the candles fell upon the old priest's gray head and the girl's beautiful face. There was no other light in the little chapel. Father Daly put one hand on her head, and his eyes filled with tears as he repeated the blessing.

'*May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you, and Himself fulfil His blessing upon you; that you may see your children's children unto the third and fourth generation; and may afterwards have everlasting life, without end, by the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, who,*

with the Father and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, God. World without end. Amen.

'*Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.*'

CHAPTER XII

THE BEGINNING OF A WEDDING JOURNEY

THAT evening at dinner Caroline Chillington watched the lovers with great interest and some diversion. If their eyes met Dick immediately became preoccupied and lost the thread of the conversation, and in Elsinora's manner there was something unusual; her colour came and went quickly when she spoke; she seemed almost shy. But Caroline thought she had never seen her look so beautiful, and she perceived that she had chosen this evening one of her prettiest dresses. 'What a head, and what a neck,'

she thought, 'for our sculptor to dream about!' Something had been said of Dick's departure, and this perhaps explained appearances. Caroline was a thoughtful sister, and determined that these two should have the evening together undisturbed. She was amused: love had brought her queenly sister down from the heights, and had made her shy like other girls. For the first time in her life Caroline felt like an elder sister.

After dinner Dick rowed across the inlet to the cutter to make sure that everything was in order on board, and Elsinora went to her room to put together some things for the journey. She could not face the ordeal of saying good-bye to Caroline. She wrote a note to her telling her that she was going with Dick, that they were going to be married, that his life was in danger and he

could not remain at Ballyvonaire, and that she would be at home again in a week.

My own (she wrote), do not be angry with me for not coming to you; it was no want of trust in you. I knew you would have helped me, but I could not bear it. When I come back I will tell you everything. I shall need your love more than ever. Do not let mother be anxious. Think of me. Pray for me and him. Good-bye, my own sister.

She took the note to Caroline's bedroom and placed it on her pillow. Greeting of one of her favourite Irish airs, which her sister was singing, came to her from the distance. Her eyes filled; she longed to run to Caroline and throw herself into her arms and tell her everything, but she could not face it. Caroline was devoted to her and a brave comrade, but would she understand? She would tell her when she returned. Or perhaps not even then. She would be truly Dick's wife. No one would know that she

had not been through the form of marriage with him. Connie had sworn to be secret. Why, then, should she distress her dear ones needlessly? She thrust from her the thought of that home-coming. A convent was now the only future resting-place which she pictured.

She wrapped herself in the cloak with the red hood which she had worn on the night when she had danced with old Thady, and went down to the quay to wait for Dick.

The night was warm with the soft touch of the south-west. The young moon was aloft. A slow pilgrimage of silver-hooded clouds was crossing the sky from the verge of the ocean to the unknown world beyond the eastern mountains. The pine woods slept, black and silent, and the dark waters

of the inlet were traversed by wandering fields of light.

The sound of dipping oars grew nearer, and Dick, pulling vigorous strokes, brought the boat alongside the quay.

'Now, darling,' he whispered as he came to her side, 'everything's ready. I will get your traps and be back in a minute.'

He was in high spirits; no thought of impending death troubled him now; the excitement and joy of the present completely possessed him. She, too, felt something of the same; she showed no hesitation, uttered no timid word, as she put her hand in his and stepped into the boat.

'So you are coming with me to be my own, my brave, sweet girl,' he said. 'Oh,

but this is better than a thousand years of life without you!'

When they were half-way across the inlet he said suddenly, 'Do you remember the last time? it was just here we listened to the echo.' A longing came over him to hear it again. 'It has haunted me ever since,' he said. 'Will you?'

The boat slipped into a space of silver waters, and a stream of moonlight fell about Elsinora. She stood up in the boat and gave the old Bavarian cattle call, — a call to bring in the merry morning and sing the joy of the warm earth. Like golden sunshine was the voice that called, like pale moonlight the answering echo came back over the water from the Glen of the Seven Whispers.

And soon the sails of the cutter flashed

white in the moonlight, and she was running out through the headlands. Beyond their shelter, the soft wind blowing in from the ocean filled her canvas and sped her merrily over a level sea.

'North or south?' cried Dick, with his hand on the tiller; 'which shall it be?'

'South,' she answered, and the boat swung round, and her bows dipped southward through the summer sea.

Dick brought up some cushions from the cabin for Elsinora, and after awhile he made fast the rudder and came to her side. The pilgrimage of clouds went on, trailing great shadows across the sea; the black headlands grew indistinct in the distance; the sound of the water meeting the shore faint and far. He put his arms round her and kissed her. 'My beautiful girl!' he said.

'My true-hearted, brave-hearted girl!' She smiled with pleasure; his glowing admiration was sweet to her. She thanked heaven for her beauty, since he found delight in it.

'How I love you!' she whispered; 'I don't think you know how much.'

She felt that love is greater than life,—is its very soul — the only meaning of creation, and she breathed her faith through him. The riddle of human existence seemed solved to him at last: in the soul of this girl he found life itself; all else was but its encircling home.

'Sweetheart,' he said, 'we were married to-day, and now we are off on our wedding journey. It is just the same as if we had been married like others. We will fancy we were. We said good-bye to them this

morning. They were all there—my uncle and Nan, and Margaret, and Tom, and old Humphry, and the rest of them—to wish us luck. And now we are away together. We have everything before us. You are my own girl at last.'

She blushed and put her arms round his neck and drew his head to her breast. The boat rose and fell gently ; the ripple of water played along its sides.

'And all night long,' he continued, 'we shall sail away down the coast. No! By and by, before the moon sets, we will find a haven and drop anchor, and you will fall asleep and rest until morning in my arms.'

She pressed his hand closer, but did not speak.

'And we have days and days before us—

better than years. We will go ashore by day; we will visit strange islands, and anchor every evening in quiet waters. Fancy exchanging this for a long life without you! Fancy not being proud of the chance of dying for a girl like you!'

A warm flush was in her cheeks; her hood had fallen back from her head, and the wind stirred the locks above her brow. She nestled closer to him, and gave him back sweet whispers for his fervent words. She, too, had now for the time forgotten the future penalty in the joy of the present. The romance and mystery of the scene enfolded them. A path of moonlight lay on the Atlantic to the far western horizon; the wash of silver seas was about the cutter; a point of light shone on a headland in the south—the world was far away.

'And, Elsinora, darling,' he said, 'it is no dream. It is real. You are my wife.'

Her arms were close round him; the warmest love of a human-hearted girl, the purest passion of a heaven-born soul, were for him in her kiss.

CHAPTER XIII

TRAGEDY OR ANTICLIMAX

Six days later, towards evening, the cutter flew in through the headlands on a gale of wind, and dropped her anchor in smooth water under the island of Clogheen.

With the coming of the night the storm increased in violence. Its full force drove from the Atlantic into the bays and estuaries of the south-west. At times the moonlight broke through the flight of clouds and flashed white on the great masses of spray hurled back from the headlands. Seaward and landward the night was full of sound: on

the shore the thunder of breakers, the on-rushing sweep of wind through the woods, its boom and rebuff and distant moan in the mountain valleys. The inlet was almost calm, but a constantly increasing swell rolled in, and long storm-driven undulations ran and echoed and welled along the wall of the quay in front of Ballyvonaire Castle.

The time of parting had come. The gale was increasing every minute, and above its roar came the sound of a gun at sea from a vessel in distress. But the lovers took no heed. It was no storm of the earth which surrounded them; it was 'an elfin storm from fairyland,' far away, heard as in a dream. The earth was for them not a battlefield but a trysting-place, and the voice of the winds and waters sounded not as a dirge but as a bridal song.

As it grew later the direction of the wind shifted a few points; its force was beginning to be felt in the inlet, and the previously smooth water was broken as Dick rowed Elsinora back to the shore. Her courage did not fail until after he had left her. Though she was very pale and trembled all over as he held her in his arms, she did not try to dissuade him from going. The temptation to do so was almost overpowering, but she conquered it. His honour, their love, should not fail in the end through weakness of hers. How he left her he could not tell; words at parting there were none. Once when he was rowing back to the cutter he fancied he heard his name called by the beloved voice, and he was not mistaken. It was too late, and the wind drowned her words. She was un-

nerved. The desire to save his life at last overcame everything else; she called again and again, but no answer came across the windy water. Then she determined that she would go to him, that if he would not save his life she must die with him. Weak and giddy, she ran down towards the quay steps, where another boat was fastened, intending to follow him. But before she had reached the boat her strength failed, and she fell to the ground with faintness. Half an hour later, when Caroline, who had seen the cutter before nightfall, and had been out a dozen times during the evening with anxious eyes, went down to the quay for a last look-out, she found Elsinora still lying unconscious.

Dick set off to face death like a man. At first he acted almost mechanically. The

atmosphere of Elsinora's love was about him, and he felt the exaltation of one who has fought and won: all life, his past, which he had hated for its failure, was transfigured and ennobled by the end: he had won, and through the girl for whom he was proud to die.

But gradually a change came over him. He began to feel the excitement of working the boat in the storm; he understood a sailing boat thoroughly; he and Tom Longfield when boys had often faced the channel in half a gale of wind. While he was still sheltered from the force of the storm by the headland on the southern side of the inlet he double-reefed his sails; he acted as a man who was going into danger and sought to overcome it, rather than as one who was seeking death.

The storm that night was memorable on the Irish coast. The whole force of the gale blew in from the Atlantic, up Bantry Bay, and the Kenmare River mouth, and raged still more fiercely to the south round the Fastnet Light, and up past Long Island into Roaring-Water Bay. It struck the cutter as she passed the headland. Dick sailed her into it as close to the wind as she would run. She was at home; she had been built for stormy seas, and had never before met the full force of the storms whose child she was. She was like a soul born for the heroic which at last finds its scope. Dick caught her spirit; his heart rejoiced as she rose to the great waves.

He took a backward glance. He saw the black loom of the mountains, and Ballyvonaire Castle white in a burst of moonlight.

Then he looked onward again, over the raging waters, out to sea. Whither was he going? how long would it last? Was he truly seeking death? He caught sight of the cushions on deck; he was at Elsinora's side again; the sound of the storm was far away, the cutter gently dipping in the swell. No! that was all over. She was won, and he was going to his death. This was no dream.

He was full of life and strength, ready to face any foe, undertake any enterprise—not to deliberately seek death. He shivered at the thought of it. 'God, for something to face and overcome, or fail in,' he thought. He could have gladly met danger ten times greater with an object beyond it,—if only Elsinora were on the distant ship, for instance, and he were facing

the forlorn hope of saving her; but to have to deliberately allow the storm to triumph, to loosen the reefs and let the boat capsize when he might have ridden the storm out, was a different thing.

And he might still run the cutter back; he could get ashore; he could go away to a distant land. Neither Elsinora nor any one else would know that he had not been drowned that night. He wavered; he was on the point of putting the boat about; the sound of another signal gun from the distressed ship braced him; he let her drive on.

A long, dark headland shot out to the north-west. It was from beyond this point that the sound of the gun came. Dick altered the course of the cutter; the wind was blowing flat on her beam; she was

running gunwale under. The cutter's size was in her favour to-night; she rose like a sea-bird over the great seas, in which a larger ship could not have lived. The moon was now obscured by masses of cloud, and the coast lights could only be seen dimly. Beyond the point there was no sign of the distressed ship. Dick made one or two tacks, but failed to sight her, not that there was the slightest chance of his being able to get alongside or take any one off if he had found her, but she was a goal: he could try, and then let the end come.

But after he had failed in his search the temptation to save his own life came over him again. He felt powerless to deliberately capsize the boat. His battle with the storm had altered the whole tendency of his mood. While Elsinora was near, impelled by her

influence he had been ready to die a hundred deaths. Now he was a man, alone, fighting against death.

So he let the cutter run on up the coast. It began to be clear to him that she would live through the gale unless he prevented it. No weather worse than that already encountered was probable. He even began to anticipate the future : the cutter might run on all night, and in the morning he would land at some sheltered place, and, well, then he must disappear for ever. The thought of the chance of Elsinora ever hearing that he had not died brought back his mood of indecision. Even death, horrible as it now looked, was less horrible than the chance of being abased in her eyes. But how could she know ? It was not fear—he had shown times enough in the last year that he was brave—which overcame

him; it was the intense clinging to life of a young man who had no immediate physical stimulus to face death.

He knew that he was going to make an attempt to save himself, and he scorned himself. He had taken upon himself to play tragedy, and he was about to achieve anticlimax.

He was wet through with spray. Every nerve in his body was braced by the excitement of the fight he had been making with the storm. He felt a glow of admiration for the cutter, almost akin to that which one gives to a living person. After the gallant fight she had made, to allow her designedly to be wrecked would be like shooting the horse which had carried you triumphantly through the fire of the enemy. This was in his mind; but he was honest enough not to

seek about for justification of the course he was taking: he faced the fact that he was incapable of deliberately seeking death, and meant to fight for life.

Once more the black clouds were broken about the moon. Headland beyond headland stood clear along the coast; the huge black seas on which the cutter rose had silver crests, and bands of white light lay seaward on the confusion of waters. The roar of the wind across the sea, its shrill cry through the rigging of the cutter, the dash of the waves against her bows, and their moan and swirl as they ran off the counter, never ceased.

It was the grandest scene in which he had ever taken part. A picture came to him: he fancied that Elsinora was on board, and that he was taking her away. She had no

fear; they were facing the storm together; they might not get through the night in safety; then they would die together; or in the morning would come the sunshine and the dying away of the gale, and in the evening they would sail into smooth waters and a happy haven, and she would be his love. The moon was obscure again, and his dream was gone. He began to fear he might be running too close to the shore, and was preparing to keep a little nearer to the wind when the cutter drove on the lift of a huge sea against a rock. The next minute he was in the water. It was as though fate had stepped in to do what he had refused to do, and the death he would not seek had sought him. But he fought it out. An oar from the cutter struck him, and he held it.

If he had been far from the shore there

would have been little chance for him in the sea then running, but the shore was close; a few minutes after the cutter struck he was dashed in on a wave against a steep beach, and dragged himself to a place of safety in spite of a broken arm and bruised body. Here his strength failed, and he lay half-benumbed until the early morning, when some fishermen found him, and carried him up to the little public-house of a neighbouring village.

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF A COMEDY

With a broken arm, a bruised body, and a touch of rheumatic fever Dick passed an intolerable week. He was as bruised and wretched of soul as of body; he scorned himself immeasurably; he wished he had died. The life which he had gained looked poverty-stricken; he could not contemplate the future. Every one would imagine him to be dead; the only object before him was to get away to some remote place of banishment as soon as his strength permitted.

He was treated with great kindness at the

inn. The cutter had gone down in deep water beyond the rock on which she struck. He was supposed by the people who picked him up to have been a passenger on the ship which had fired the distress guns and was afterwards wrecked, and he was content that they should so think.

One morning about ten days after his parting with Elsinora he went out to sit in the sun on the bench in front of the inn. He was gloomily revolving some plans while he smoked an unattractive pipe, when he was aroused by hearing the name of O'Connor. Two men were talking in the room of the inn; through the open window he could hear what they were saying, and he listened.

'There's no luck for us at all,' said one speaker; ''tis just one misfortune afther the next. He was the man for us — one o'

the ould stock with good blue blood; them's the men we want, not your pewkopiles of linen dthrapers. Oh wisha, where'll we find the like of him?'

'Where indeed? It throubles me soul to think of it. There's no shance for us or the counthry.'

'He was a good man, God rest him.'

'He was that, divil a finer.'

'And his head wint quare, the Lord preserve us.'

'His heart was just broke with working, and all for nothing, out in America—that's the long and the short of it, Tom.'

''Twas Joe Garvey toult ye the whole histhry of it?'

'Old Joe himself; there was no one in the house but Joe and a slip of a gerrl to help in the kitchen. All day long, says Joe,

he was as sinsible as meself till after the Captain wint away to Cork in the afthernoon, and a little gossoon brought in the news about the young lady being down with the fever. Then, says old Joe, he got quare, and wint to his room, and began thramping up and down; and he wouldn't take his supper, nor lave any one come anear him, but just wint thramping up and down. Joe wint first to the door, and then to the window; and then he watched him, poor man, through the crack in the inside door.'

'Ah, sure, 'tis you have the old story of it.'

'Indeed I have. Old Joe Garvey thrimbled like a lafe when he toult me. Well, afther it was dark, he kep' on walking about, and then he'd look at his watch, and "Two hours now," say he, and thin later on, "One

hour left," says he, and then he got out his revolver and took a look at it, and then he sat down.'

'The Lord preserve us, and keep us from harrm.'

'There was no one in the house but Joe, and Joe was thransfixed to the ground with fear, and thin the O'Connor he says, "Time's up," says he, and he took a letther out of his pocket and kissed it. "Time's up," says he, "God save Ireland," and with that he took up the revolver and shot himself there and thin.'

Dick had listened breathless. He staggered to his feet; he had not recovered his strength; he felt faint, and was obliged to sit down again.

'All the boys in the counthry was at the funerial—a grand sight; and 'tis I'd have

been there meself too, if 'tweren't for havin' to keep out o' the way afther the little account I settled with Emergency Brian.'

'Phaix, he deserved what you gave him. And the young lady? I never had the luck to see her meself, but I hear there isn't the likes of her between this and the city of Dublin. Tell me, will she get betther?'

'Plase God she will, though I heard tell the docthor was doubting himself about it. But 'tis over a week now since I had the news.'

'Well, well, whatever happens, 'tis the will o' God.'

Dick pulled himself together. He found his landlord, and arranged about his departure and the immediate procuring of a horse and car to carry him. He had no money; he had told the landlord so at the

beginning, but he had been none the less kindly entertained on that account; his host, though a poor man, treated it as a matter of no importance.

Dick instructed his driver to go in the direction of Ballyvonaire. The distance was twenty-four miles, and the driver thought they might arrive at three o'clock. He was a pleasant and communicative person, but he soon gave up his attempts to talk to his irresponsive companion. 'Twenty-four miles,' he murmured to himself, ''tis just twenty-four miles when a man's alone, and 'tis twelve miles when he's wid a gerrl. But, be the powers, 'tis forty-eight whin he's wid a dummy.'

Dick, weather-worn and unkempt, sat on the opposite side of the car with compressed lips. Elsinora was lying between life and death, he had heard, and he could not dwell

for long on anything but this. But his mind was crowded with troubled thoughts. O'Connor was dead; that brought him no relief, rather it deepened his sense of shame. O'Connor had been true, while he had been false; his reason had broken down, and he had believed himself the loser, and his sense of honour had risen strong through his mental derangement, and he had carried out on himself the sentence which should have been his own. Whatever his faults, O'Connor had been true to himself, and to his country, and to his lady. He thought of his own folks at home, and of the suffering they would have to undergo at the news of his death. If only Elsinora had been common clay—a woman who would have rejoiced in his preservation, no matter what the cost —and that he could have returned to her

without fear, how much happier it would have been for all! And yet even now, if he could have had her such instead of the woman he knew her to be, he would not have rejoiced in the exchange.

He suffered intensely as he thought of her lying ill. The shock of her parting from him, the tragedy of O'Connor's death, must have been a strain terrible to bear. He longed to see her for one minute before he went, he longed to comfort her, but he was banished. He must go away, an exile for years or for ever. He must serve her by making the rest of his life such as she would approve. And she, his own, his beloved girl, his brave sweetheart, his wife,—she was now between life and death perhaps, and he dared not go to her. He had found his punishment.

He said good-bye to his driver at the little village near the entrance to the Ballyvonaire inlet. He took the path by the shore, and walked on without knowing whither or why. September was radiant again. It was an afternoon full of bright colours and clear distances. The inlet looked to him as it had looked on that afternoon, a year before, when he had rowed to the island with Elsinora. His thoughts reverted to that afternoon. Of all the beautiful pictures he had treasured of Elsinora, his recollection of her as she looked then was most delightful. He recalled her appearance as she was rowing — her white dress, the beauty of her figure, the overflowing fun in her eyes ; and afterwards, when he had troubled her, and she was leaning against the little font in the chapel.

And then he recalled her as he had seen her last, in the moonlight on the deck of the cutter, and that picture made him tremble—it was more than merely beautiful.

He came to a turn of the shore which brought to view Ballyvonaire Castle and the quay. A strange scene was before him. On the opposite side of the inlet the water was crowded with boats of all descriptions. The distance was too great for clear sight of what was taking place; but presently he noticed a movement amongst the boats, and they started in an irregular procession across the inlet.

Not far from the shore where Dick stood lay the Island of Clogheen, and towards it the boats were being rowed. A feeling of awe came over him as he watched the silent procession approaching. As it drew closer he perceived that it was a funeral. He

remembered that within the walls of the chapel on the island there was a little burial-ground, and Elsinora had once described to him a scene such as this. His heart stood still.

In all the boats there was silence; the only sound was the dip of the oars and the ripple of the water. The calm and beauty of the autumn afternoon was on land and sea. The dark reflection of the mountain sides lay clear in the deep blue inlet. The island of many colours, ringed with seaweed, was bright in sunshine.

In the bows of the leading boat stood Father Daly, with bare head, holding aloft in the sunshine a silver crucifix; then came rowers rowing muffled oars, and behind was the coffin covered with a cloth of gold. Here was hidden the dear lady of the land.

In the next boat were Mr. Chillington, Doctor O'Keefe, and Tristram. Gentlemen of the neighbourhood followed in their own boats. Then came the people connected with Ballyvonaire, tenant farmers, servants, and labourers; and after them, as many of the peasantry of the district as could procure any sort of craft to carry them. Some of the boats were almost dangerously crowded with ragged creatures who loved their lady; and there was one boat which had no occupant except the old man who rowed it; this was O'Connor's.

The grave was made in the grass-grown enclosure of the ruined chapel. The procession came slowly onward, dark and silent, making a gloom on the bright water; but radiant, as on a cloud in the west, the golden sunshine rested on the boat which carried Elsinora.

CHAPTER XV

FAREWELL

It was a fine morning in the early winter. The sun had won its way through the mist, and was warming the sheltered corner of the old Farinder garden. Humphry Wrixon was smoking his pipe and meditating on a letter which he had received that morning from Dick. Presently Tom Longfield and Nan came into the garden hand in hand. Humphry's face had been grave, but a pleasant smile filled his eyes as he watched them walking to and fro. Next month they were to be married. Tom's regiment was to

be stationed at Plymouth, and they would therefore be within visiting distance. Nan's happiness was delightful to see, and Tom's complete subjection and devotion to the quiet little maiden was agreeable to Humphry; he remembered that young gentleman's lordly demeanour in the past.

'Yes, my dear,' he observed to himself, 'you have him thoroughly in hand, and so you'll keep him. You are a very clever little person in your way, and Tom is not a very clever person, and you both have good hearts, and you'll manage him all your life without letting him know it, and you'll both be very happy. You will both play the game properly. You will take the world as it is and enjoy the present, and never have any stupid and unrealisable ideas, and never be disappointed; and you will have a fine

family of wholesome boys and girls, and Tom will be very domestic, and in a few years he will forget that he ever thought he could be a great commander of armies ; and he will avoid foreign service and please the old man by settling down at Farinder, and he will become the colonel of the yeomanry, and entertain them at lunch at the Manor-House on bank holidays ; he will go regularly to church, he will be a staunch Conservative, a judge of cattle, a J.P., and all that a woman should desire in a husband. You will act excellently; you are philosophers unconsciously, playing the only parts which our stage allows to be performed successfully. And the others——?'

His face grew grave again. Dick said little in his letter to indicate the view which he now took of the performance. It was

written on board an Orient steamer, and posted at Port Said, but gave no particulars of his movements. He asked Humphry to open any letters which might come directed to him, and ended with words of greater affection than he was in the habit of expressing. Humphry laid the letter down sadly, and opened another, which was addressed to Dick. This was from Strong—a letter full of good tidings of his success in the new world. It contained the following postscript from Connie :—

Bob's too modest. He hasn't half told you what a big man he is in this place. We're toffs. They think more of ladies out here than they do at home. I was never made such a fuss of before. Bob says I'm improved in my looks since I was married. He's going to be mayor in a year or two, and his politics are changing. We don't hear much against rich people now. When I'm Mrs. Mayor I mean to entertain in style. I rather astonished some of them when we first

came by my riding. It was at a picnic. I got on an untrained colt, a buck jumper, and put him through some tricks. There were a lot of young fellows there, and my aunt! weren't they pleased. But now we're getting too grand for larking, and in my present condition, which Bob has mentioned to you, riding ain't prudent. If you write to me I will write again. I have written to the Irish princess, who is the best lady in the world. I often think of you, and our journey when we ran away from the circus, and the dear old moke. I'd like to have a day like that with you again. But if ever you come as far as this we'll have some fun, and I'll entertain you at dinner to make up for your treating me that night when we went to the theatre. Remember me to the Professor, and tell your fat uncle I send him a kiss. I hope you are happy and prosperous. Really and truly I do.—Your affectionate CONNIE.

'You impertinent little jade!' said Humphry aloud; 'you vain abomination! A person like you deserves death; you have spoilt three lives, and you have been the marplot of a most excellent comedy.'

A curious smile at his own expense was on his face. 'And yet,' he thought, after a

minute's reflection, '*she* was not the Marplot after all: it was Love.'

Presently Tom left Nan and strolled over to him.

'Hullo, Tom,' said he, assuming a cheerful tone, 'how is it you are not out to-day with the stag-hounds? I understood they met at Ladywood Cross.'

'Thought I'd stay with Nan,' said Tom; 'she's a little upset about Dick. Anything more from him in your letter?'

'Some instructions about money. It's brief enough; he says he cannot return. Don't tell Nan that.'

'Doesn't he say in your letter, either, where he's going?'

'Not a word.'

'I expect he's going to join some men he met in Egypt on some exploring expedition

they were talking of in Central Africa or Abyssinia,' said Tom. 'Or perhaps he's off to India, or China, or Australia, God knows. Poor old chap! what hard lines he has had. How long do you think it will take him to get over it? When shall we see him again, Humphry? A couple of years?'

'A couple of years! I don't believe he will come at all.'

'What nonsense,' exclaimed Tom, with some alarm in his tone; 'he'll get over it all right in time—every one does. Upon my soul, I think things have not turned out so badly: the other day we were in fear and trembling for his life, and now that ruffian O'Connor is dead and—and Miss Chillington, too, unfortunately; but he is free to live, and such wounds always heal up.'

'Well, Tom, there is no harm in hoping.'

'I tell you,' said Tom, 'he'll come back; and how jolly it would be if he were to marry Margaret some day. You know, I believe she won't marry any one else; they were always awfully fond of each other. By Jove! how jolly it would be.'

'Ah, yes, how jolly!' replied Humphry, 'but I believe we have seen the last of Dick.'

Tom returned to Nan feeling vexed with Humphry; but he soon forgot his dissatisfaction in the discussion of their own joyful plans for the future.

Humphry was disinclined to sit still that morning; he left his seat and his books, and decided on walking. He went through the garden down into the old courtyard. Voweraker, grown very feeble, was piling apples in the Tythe barn; no one else

was about the place; it was deserted and lonely. He looked in as he passed the chapel. Mr. Wrixon was there contemplating the unfinished blocks at the intersections of the arch mouldings. In his workshop were the clay models for the uncarved heads; these were full of beauty, well worthy to be set beside the existing ones. He had worked on the idea suggested by Clovis Shovel, and had preserved the same face throughout, making it tell the story of a soul; in the last, where the face was that of an old man, the lines of trouble were lost, and the expression closely resembled that of the first and most youthful of the faces. Mr. Wrixon was almost satisfied with the result himself; but, even now, he hesitated to touch the virgin stone.

'Well, John,' said Humphry, 'going to

make a beginning at last on the real thing?'

'No, Humphry,' replied the old man, 'I have been turning it over in my mind. If I do it at all it will not be yet. I should like Dick to see the last models before I touch the stone. I shall wait till Dick comes home. Yes, Humphry, I've made up my mind to wait till Dick comes.'

Humphry crossed Nan's garden, which was sweet with winter violets. Beyond, at the edge of the shrubbery, where it opened on the fields, he paused and sat down on the stump of a tree, curiously contemplating a couple of weedgrown borders. A few rose-bushes and some stalks of London Pride were the only survivors from better days when Dick and Nan had made their first garden here; but they had more attraction

for Humphry now than the bright flower-beds which had superseded them.

He felt very lonely this morning. Dick was gone, and Nan was going. This apparently cynical and comfort-loving man had more power to love, more desire to be loved, than others knew.

After a while he fell to moralising, as was his wont. 'So Dick found the girl who was his ideal and lost her,' he thought; 'and if she had lived and married him, she might have ceased to be his ideal. And she! she found her ideal of love, and she is gone, and holds it safe for ever.'

The sound of a huntsman's horn came across the fields. He looked up and saw the hillside gay with the movement of riders and hounds. A few minutes more and they were away across country. When he next looked

up he saw Margaret Longfield on horseback, riding slowly down the road towards the village. She had ridden part of the way to the meet with her father, but had felt no inclination to follow the hounds. Humphry understood the reason.

'It's all very sad,' he said to himself, 'and strange, and comical. This life of ours is very difficult to understand. It's all right, though, I suppose, if you don't take it seriously.'

But the first tears which Humphry had shed since he was a boy filled his eyes now as he thought of the end of his comedy.

THE END

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